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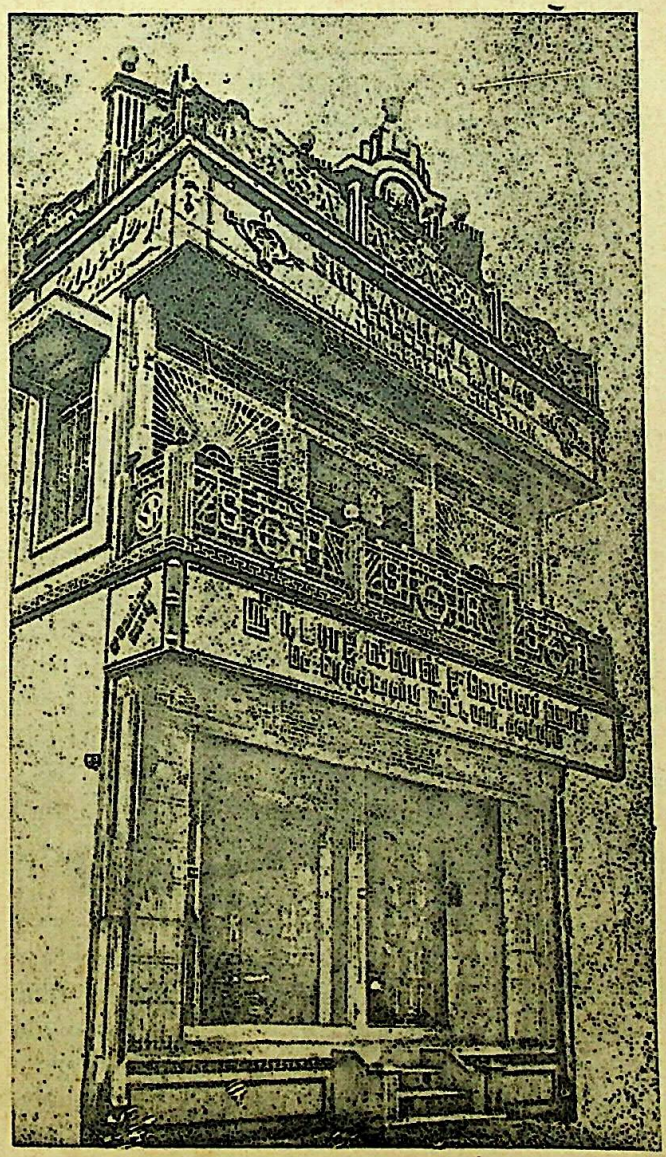

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HOLY MOTHER BIRTH CENTENARY NUMBER

JULY, 1954

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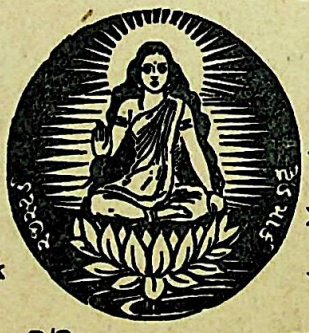

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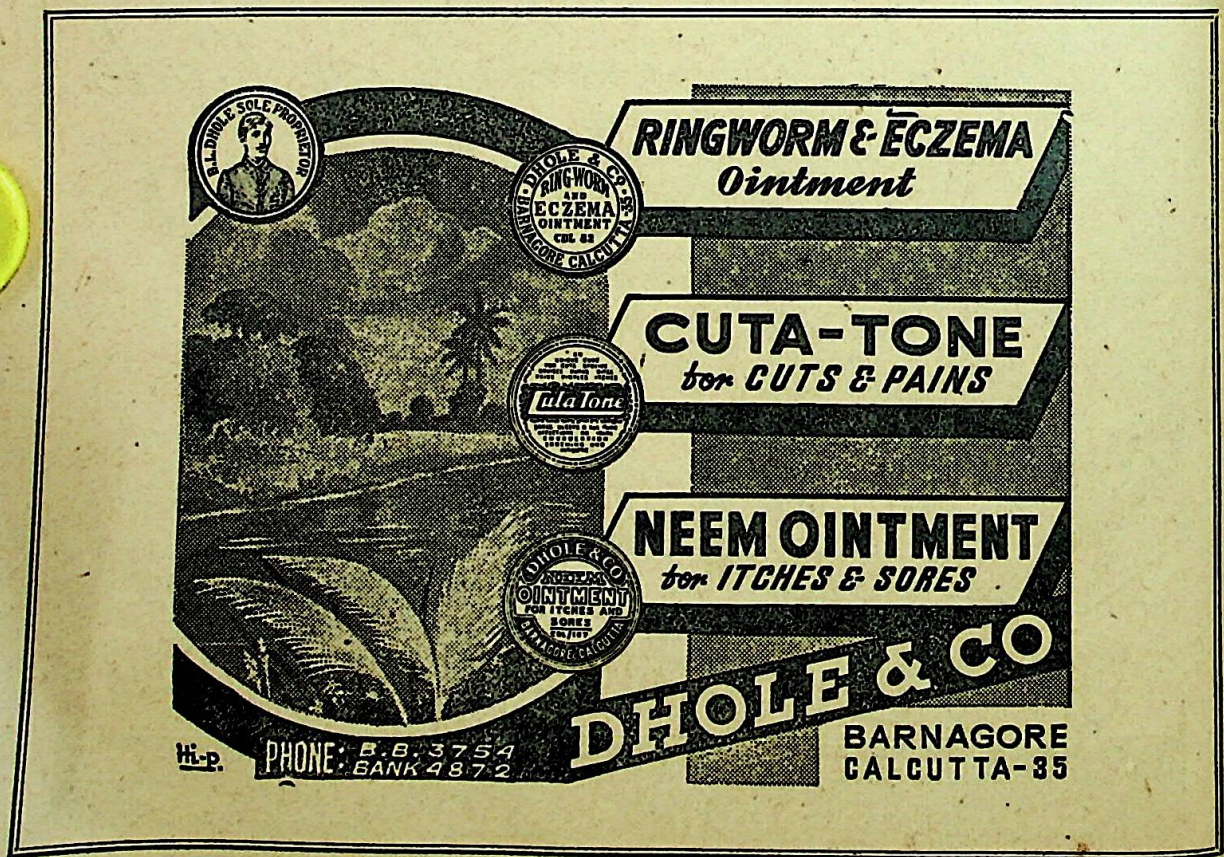

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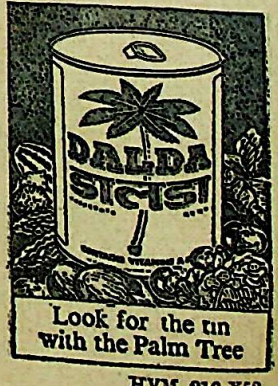

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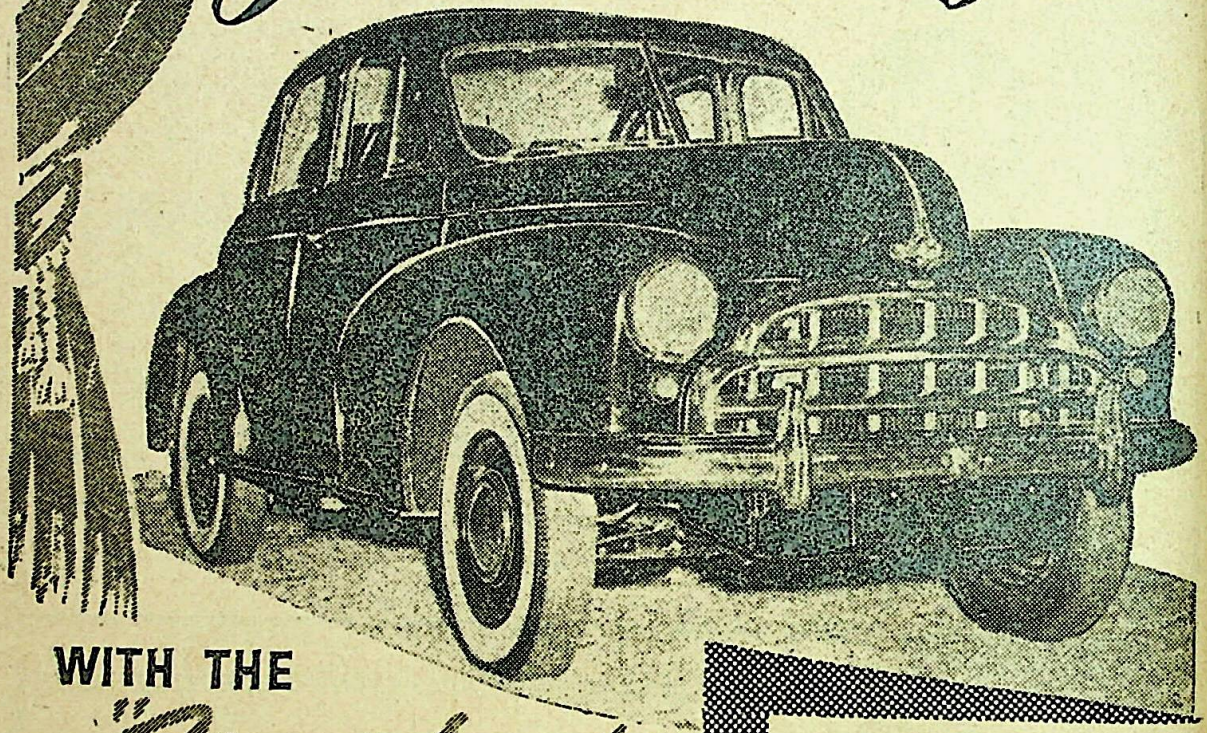

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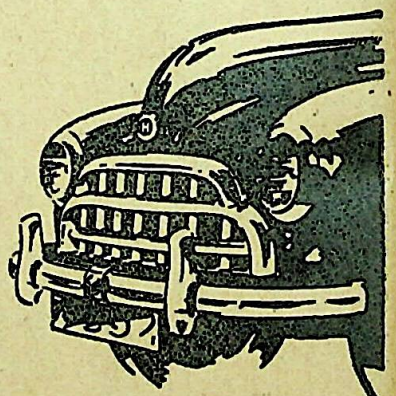

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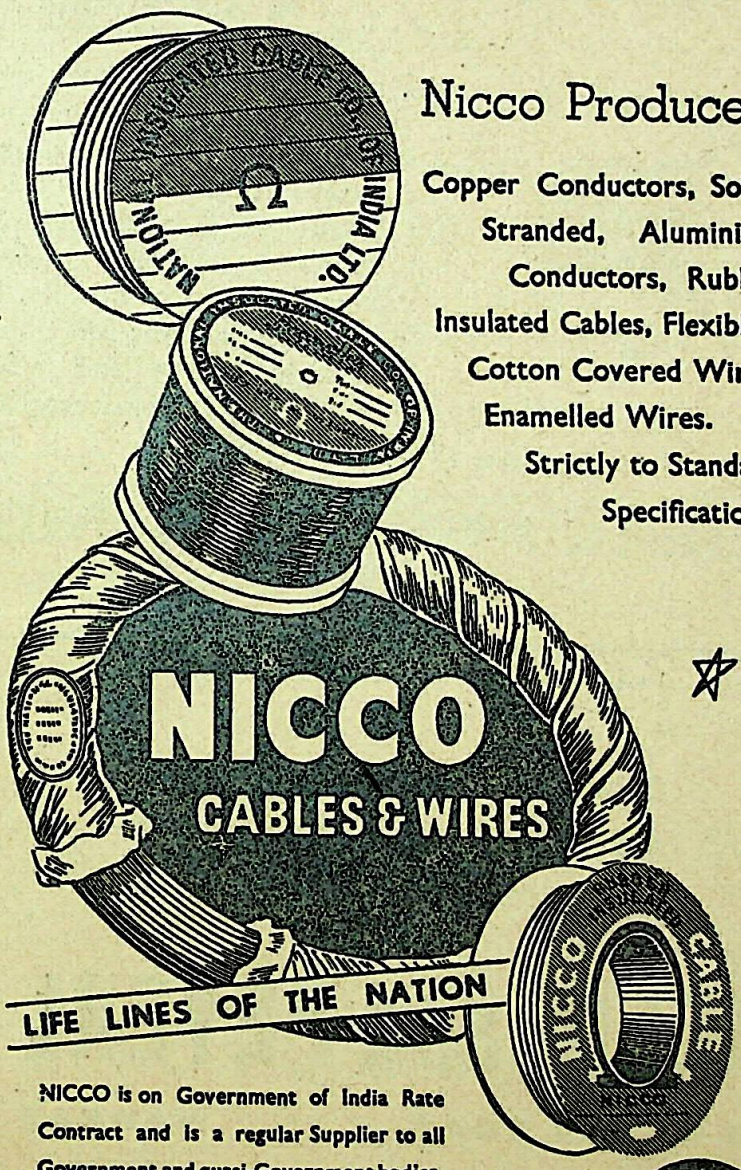

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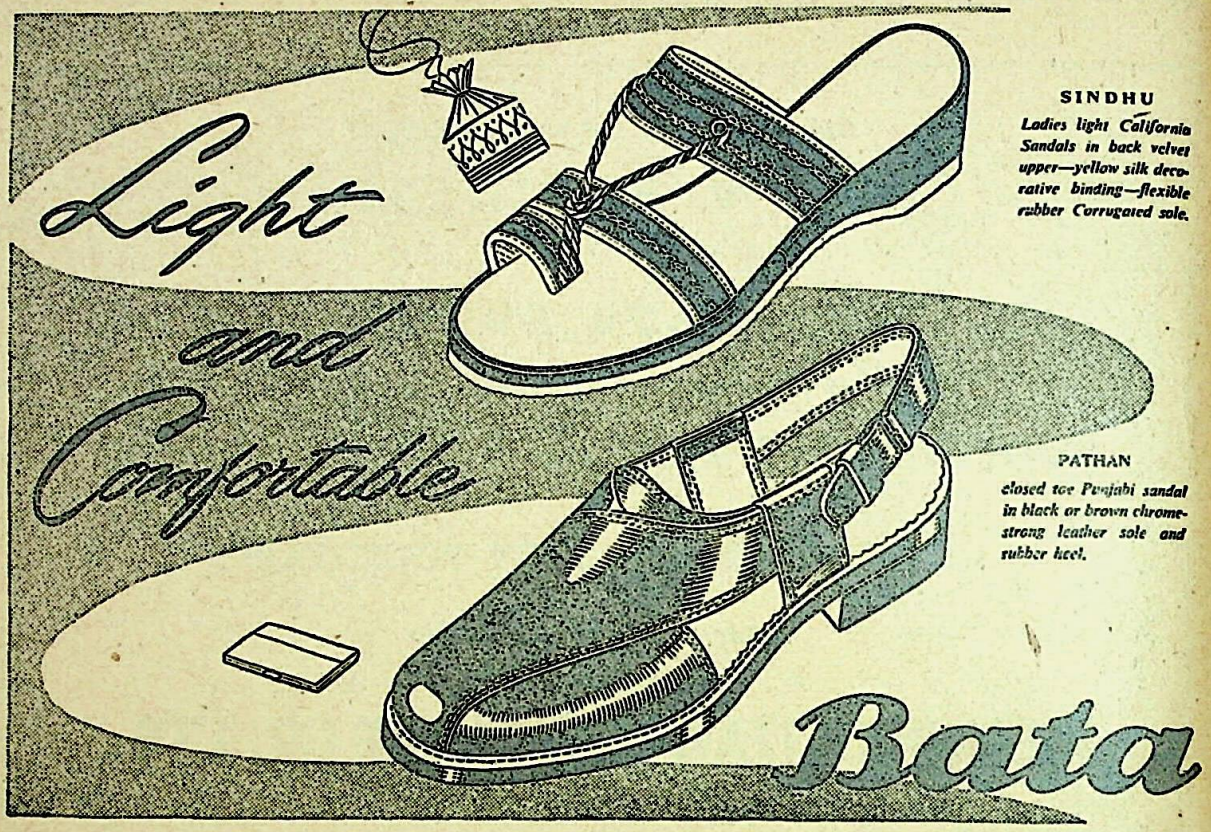

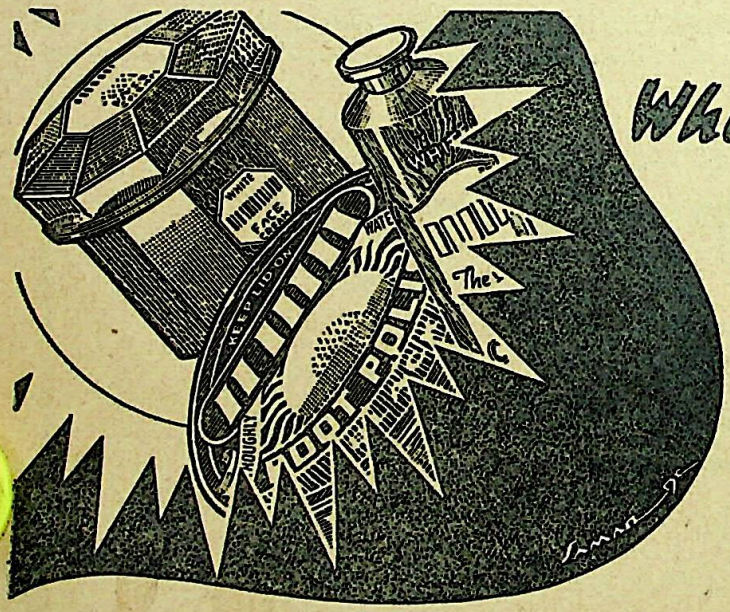

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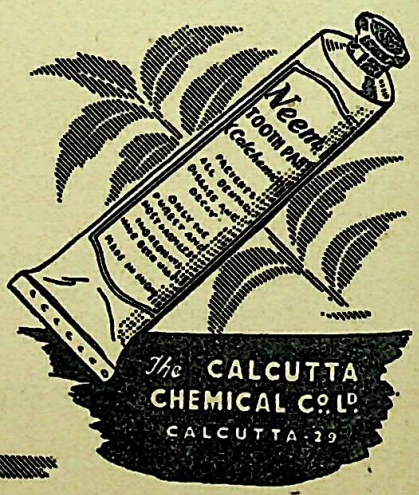

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Repeat the name of God always from the innermost core of your heart, and in all sincerity take refuge in the Master. Do not bother to know how your mind is reacting to things around. And do not waste time in calculating and worrying over whether or not you are progressing in the path of spirituality. It is ahamkara (vanity) to judge progress for oneself. Have faith in the grace of your Guru and Ishta.

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God is one's very own. The more intensely a person practices spiritual disciplines, the more quickly he attains to God.

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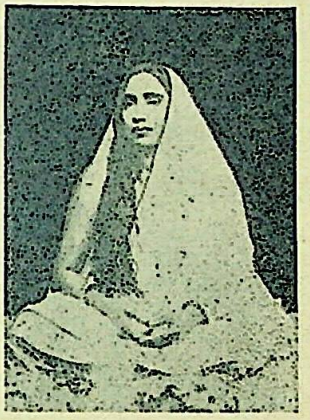

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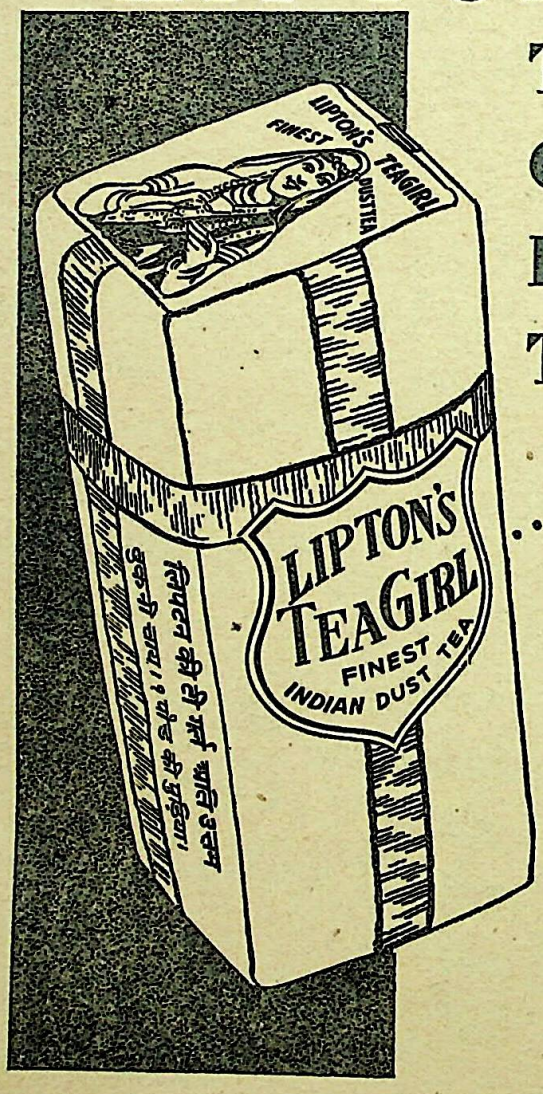

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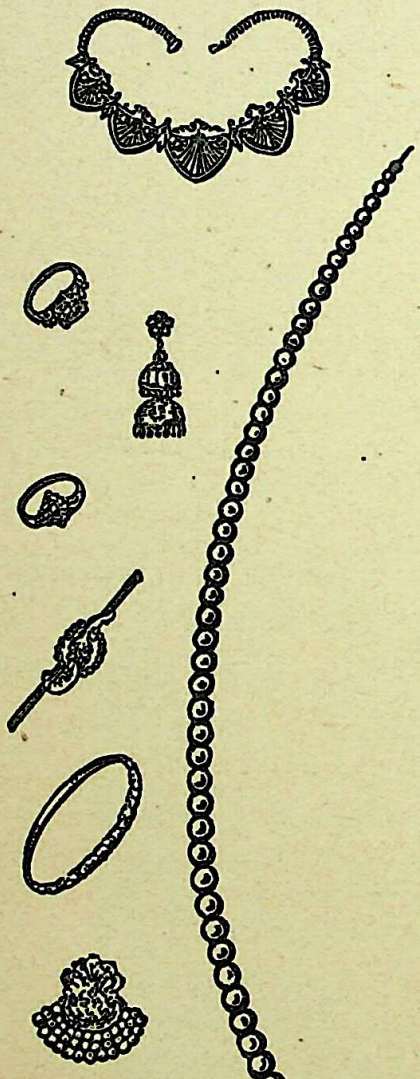

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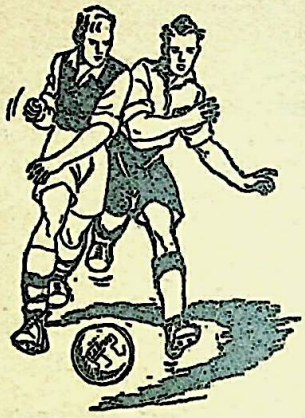

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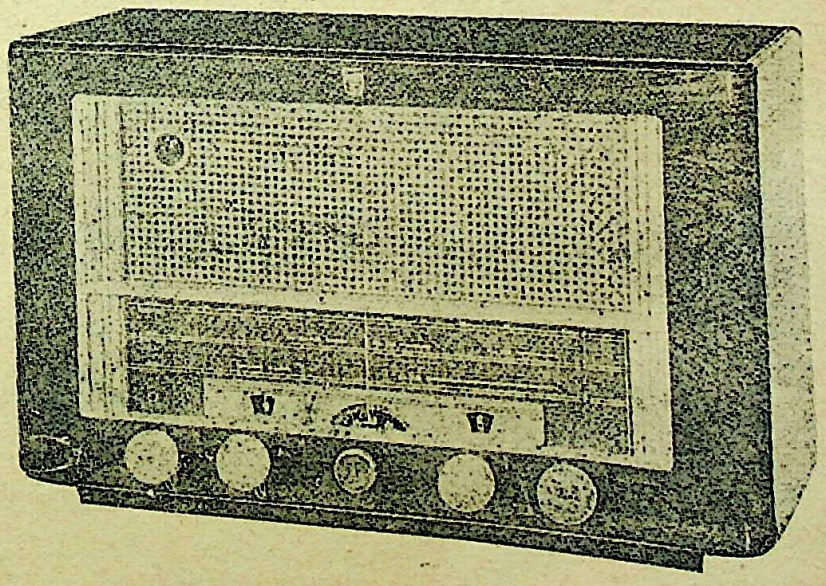

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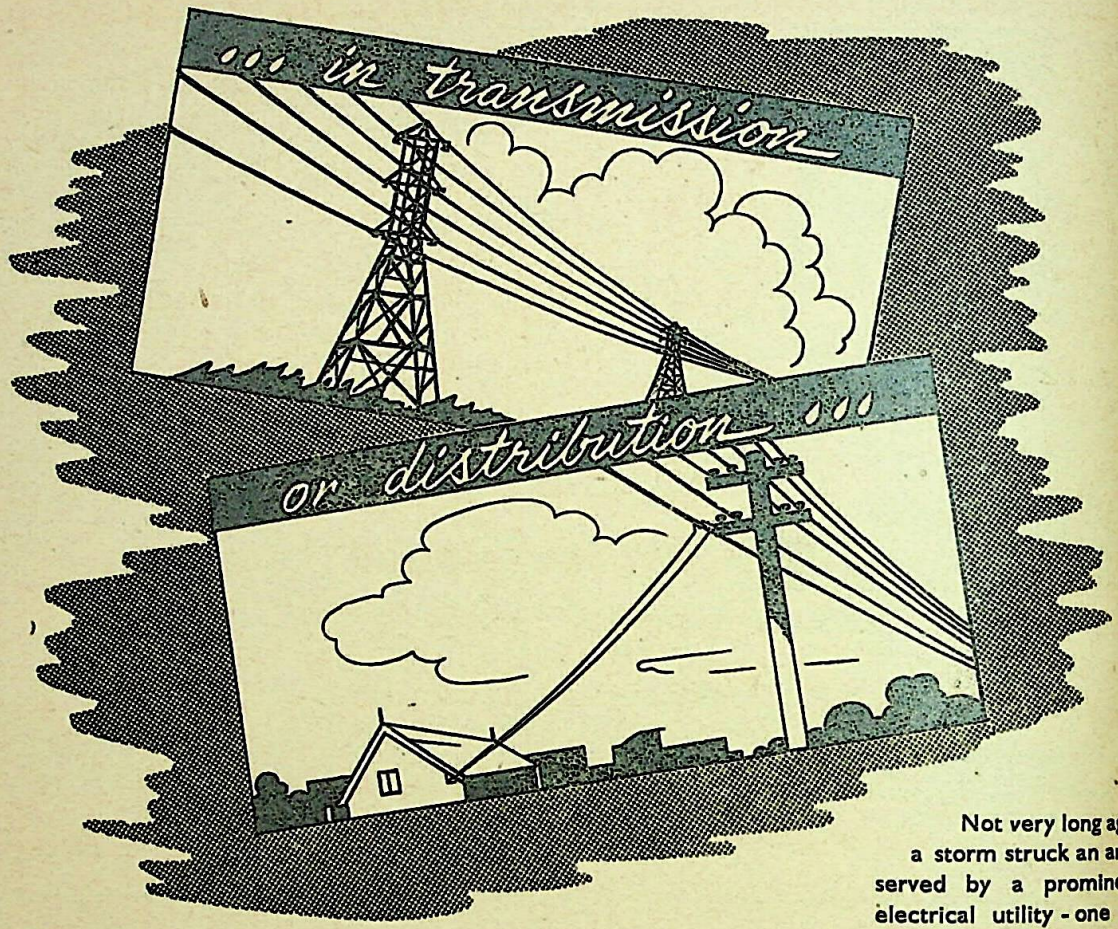

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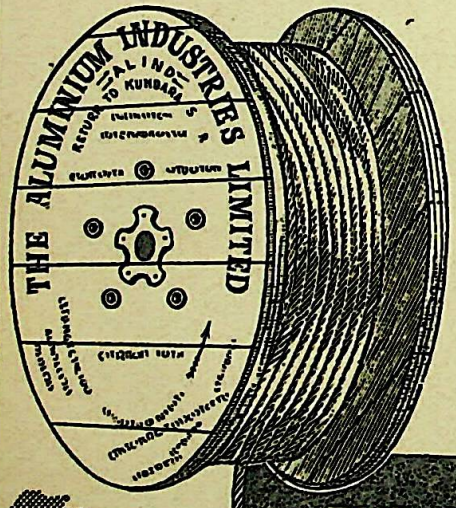

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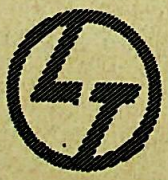
IN SERVICE  ***LIES SUCCESS***

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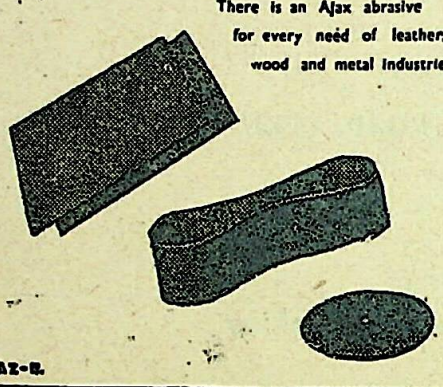

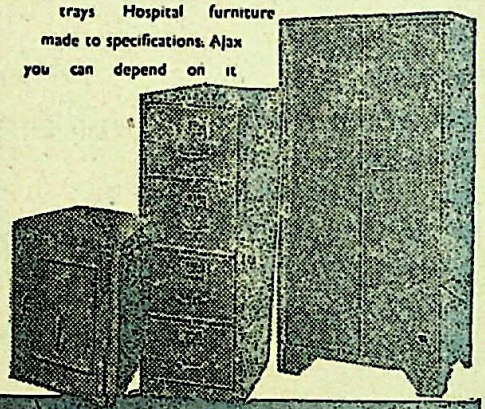

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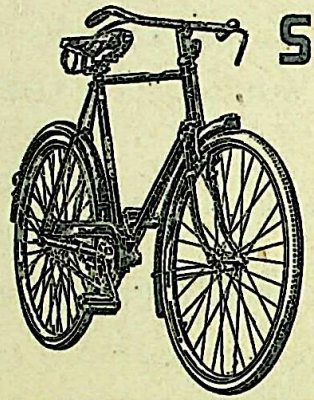

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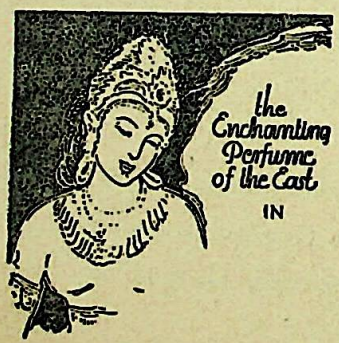

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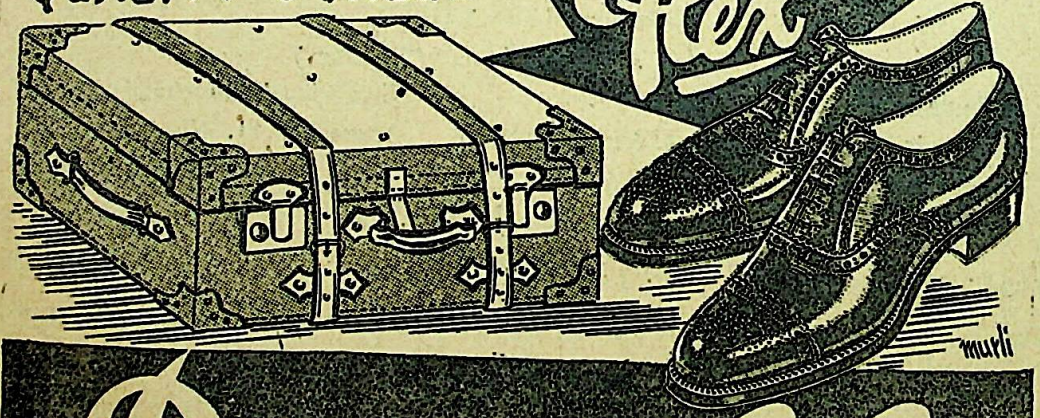

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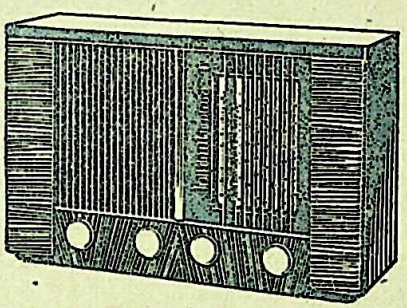

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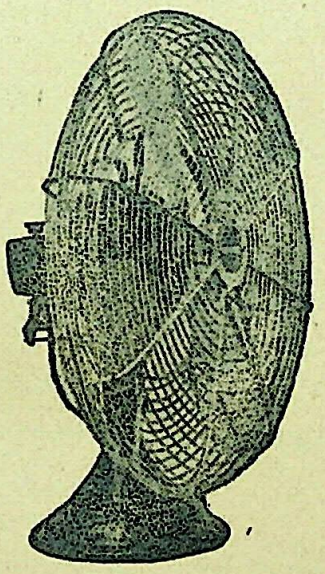

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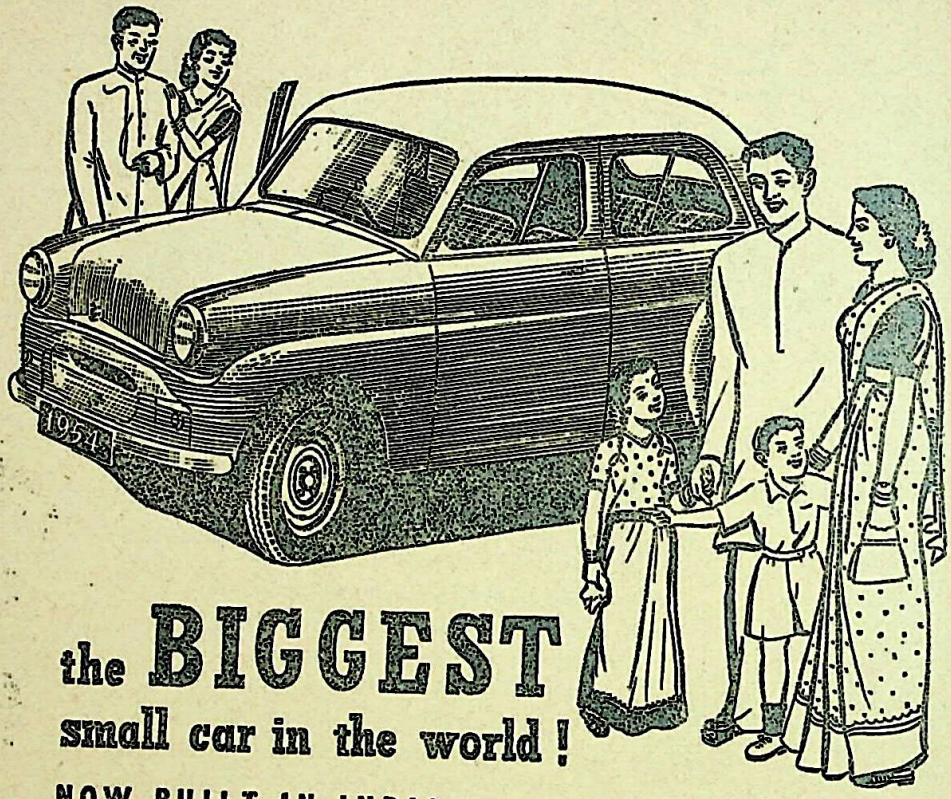

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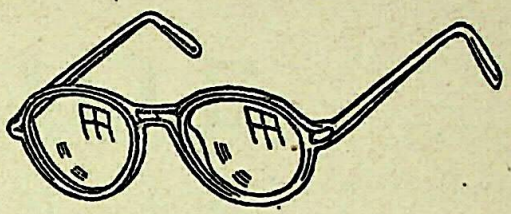

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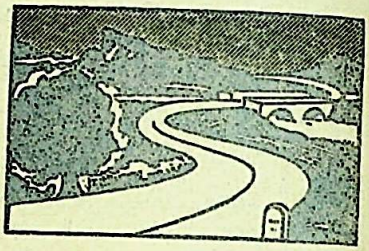

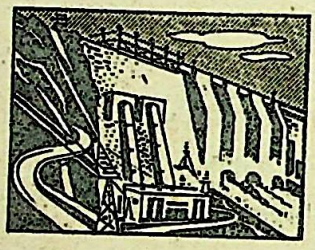

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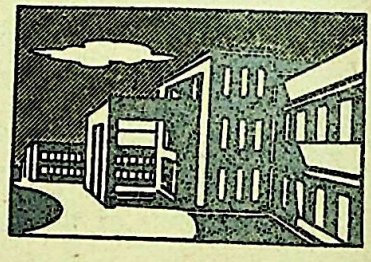

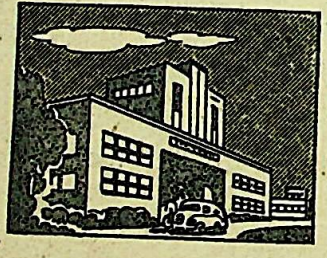

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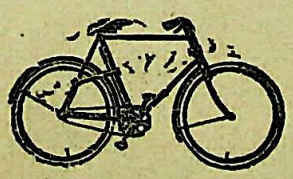

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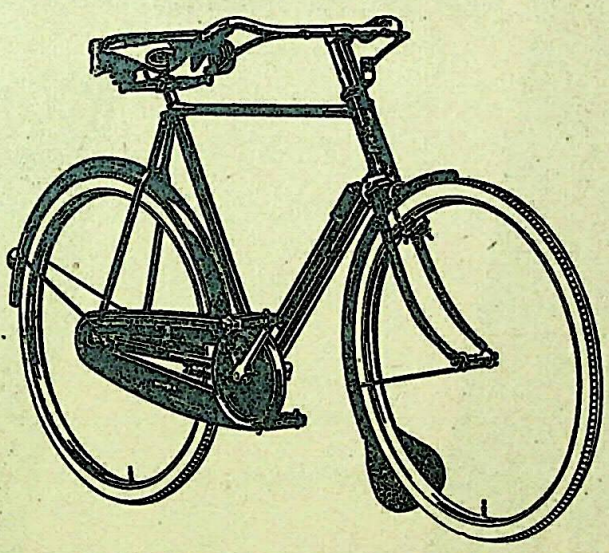

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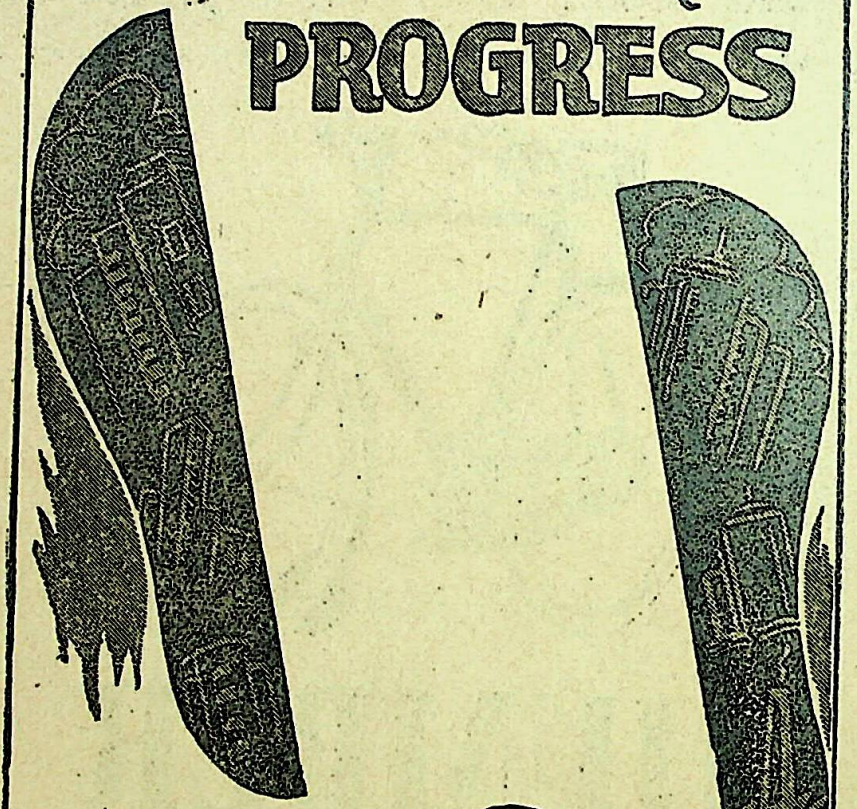

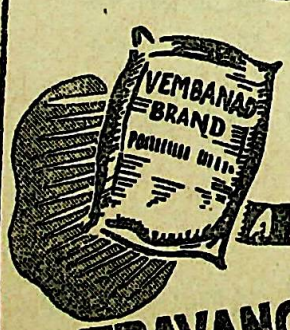

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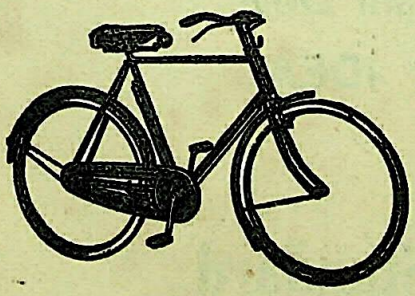

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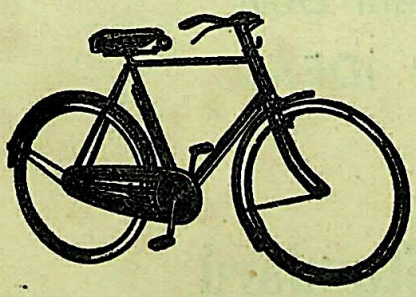

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OUR

Deep and respectful

.. HOMAGE ..

to the

HOLY MOTHER

Sri Sri Saradamani Devi

THE MOTHER IDEAL

★

Hindusthan Standard

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'If you want peace, my child, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own.'

HOLY MOTHER

THE VEDANTA KESARI

THE HOLY MOTHER BIRTH CENTENARY NUMBER

VOL. XLI JULY 1954 No. 3

INVOCATION TO THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

अदितिर्द्यौरदितिरन्तरिक्षमदितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः।
विश्वे देवा अदितिः पञ्च जना अदितिर्जातमदितिर्जनित्वम् ॥

Rg. v. 1. 89. 10. Ath. v. 7. 6. 1.

Mother Aditi is heaven, She is the sky, She is Mother; that father and son are also Aditi; All the Gods are Aditi, and also men; Aditi is all that is and all that will be.

महीमू षु मातरं सुव्रतानामृतस्य पत्नीमवसे हवामहे।
तुविक्षत्रामजरन्तीमुरूचीं सुशर्माणमदितिं सुप्रणीतिम् ॥

Sukla Yv. 21.5. Ath. v. 7. 6. 2.

We invoke for protection Aditi, that great Mother of excellent vows, the spouse of the moral order, mighty, never aging, wide, bestowing happiness and giving the proper lead.

या प्राणेन सम्भवति अदितिर्देवतामयी।
गुहां प्रविश्य तिष्ठन्तीं या भूतेभिर्व्यजायत ॥ एतद्वै तत् ॥

Katha Up. iv. 7.

That Aditi of the form of all gods, who, through life-breath (Hiranyagarbha), issued forth from the Supreme Being, who issued forth along with living beings, who has entered the inner heart of beings and abides there, he who understands Her understands that Supreme Being Itself.

तामग्निवर्णां तपसा ज्वलन्तीं वैरोचनीं कर्मफलेषु जुष्टाम्।
दुर्गां देवीं शरणमहं प्रपद्ये सुतरसि तरसे नमः ॥

Kṛ. Yv. Taitt. Ar. x. 1.

I seek as refuge that Goddess Durga of the hue of fire, blazing in her penance, consort of the Lord of light, and resorted to (by devotees) for the purification of their acts. Obeisance to you who are a boat to take us easily across to salvation.

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श्री शारदा षोडशी स्तुतिः
वे. राघवेण समर्पिता

SRI SARADA SHODASI[1] STUTI

Offered by
V. Raghavan

या शारदैव सकलागमबोधरूपा
श्रीरामकृष्णपरहंसपतिव्रताभूत् ।
श्रीशारदामणिरिति प्रथिताभिधाना
तां मातरं प्रणमत प्रियभक्तवर्गाः ॥ १ ॥

1. O beloved devotees, pay obeisance to that Mother, who was celebrated by the name Saradamani and who was Goddess Sarasvati Herself who had become the devoted wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

पद्भ्यामेव प्रस्थितां दक्षिणेश-
क्षेत्रं मध्ये हन्त तीव्रज्वरार्ताम् ।
यां साक्षात्सा कालिकोपेत्य देवी
स्वस्थां चक्रे ते स्वसास्मीति चाह ॥ २ ॥

2. Whom, when she had started on bare foot to Dakshinesvar and taken seriously ill on the way, that Goddess Kalika approached, cured and addressed, 'I am your sister.'[2]

श्रीशारदां शारदचन्द्रबिम्ब-
सौम्याननां भावयतां मनस्सु ।
नूनं विनष्टाखिलपापपङ्कः
प्रकाशते ज्ञानमयः प्रसादः ॥ ३ ॥

3. To those who contemplate Sri Sarada of face pleasing like the orb of the autumnal moon, there surely shines forth in the minds a transparence born of knowledge consequent on the entire disappearance of the mire of sin.

पयोदलेखाञ्चितचन्द्रचारु
शैवालवल्लीयुतपद्मशोभम् ।
प्रान्तैकलम्बालकमाननं तत्
मातुस्सदा नो हृदि सन्निधत्ताम् ॥ ४ ॥

4. That face of the Mother with the tresses hanging on one side, charming like the moon adorned by a streak of the cloud and beautiful like the lotus with a creeper of moss, may that face be present always in our hearts.

'व्यपगतकलङ्कलेशा
स्वच्छतरा स्यां शशांकाच्च'।
इत्थं प्रार्थितवत्या
मात्रा स्यामेह सर्वतः पूताः ॥ ५ ॥

5. 'Rid of even the slightest stain, may I be purer than even the moon,'[3]—May the Mother who prayed like this purify us completely.

उदीर्णसर्वाद्वयबोधवारिधिं
विलोक्य तं हन्त पतिं पतिव्रता ।
जुहाव या यौवनमात्मनो हविः
तदीयवैराग्यपवित्रपावके ॥ ६ ॥

6. Seeing her lord looking verily an ocean of the fully arisen awareness of universal oneness, She, the devoted wife, who poured forth her youth as oblation in the holy fire of her lord's renunciation—

---

1. *Shodasi*—the Hymn has sixteen verses, and refers to Saradamani having received worship as Goddess Shodasi at the hands of the Paramahamsa.

2. See p. 28 of *Sri Sarada Devi, Her Life and Conversations.*

3. See p. 51, *ib.*

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शिवमनु तपसि निविष्टा
तमपि जयन्ती निजैर्नियमैः ।
पार्वत्येवैषेति
ध्यायत भोः शारदां जननीम् ॥ ७ ॥

7. Contemplate on that Mother Sarada as Goddess Parvati Herself, who, following Siva, entered on penance and by her austerities, vanquished Siva too.

मधुरभावमुपेत्य समेयुषीं
स्त्रियमहो रुषि भर्तरि निन्दति ।
सपदि या क्षमया परिगृह्णती
स्वमतिशायिशमं समदर्शयत् ॥ ८ ॥

8. When her lord was angrily chiding a lady who had approached him in *madhura-bhava*, she who rescued that lady with forbearance and showed (thus) her own excelling quietude.[4]

वणिजि दशसहस्रं दातुकामे, विरक्ते
भगवति च परीक्षां कर्तुकामे स्वपत्न्याः ।
समरजततृणा या दर्शयामास भूयोऽ-
प्यचलितधृतिनिष्ठां नैजवैराग्यकाष्ठाम् ॥ ९ ॥

9. When the merchant[5] desired to give (the Master) ten thousand rupees, and the Master desired to test his wife, She who, equal in her attitude to silver and a blade of grass, displayed again the acme of her desirelessness established in unshakable contentment.

षोडशीमेव तां कृत्वा सर्वस्त्रीजननीमतिः ।
पूजयन्नो गुरुर्नूनं सा देव्येवेत्युपादिशत् ॥ १० ॥

10. Making her Goddess Shodasi Herself and worshipping her,[6] the Gurudev, to whom all women were Mother, imparted to us the secret that she was the Goddess Herself.

अहो समन्तान्मनुजाः कृपणाः कृमयो यथा ।
त्वमेतानुगृह्णीष्वेत्युक्ता भगवतैव या ॥ ११ ॥

11. 'Alas! all around men live wretched like worms; you help them,'[7] so told by Bhagavan,—

पतिदत्तमहामन्त्रग्रामशेवधितां गता ।
तदन्यूनात्मशक्त्याभूद् आचार्या स्वयमुत्तमा ॥ १२ ॥

12. She who became herself the foremost Teacher, her powers not less than his and a treasure of great Mantras imparted to her by him.

वक्तुं 'त्वम्' इति यामेकवचनेन न चक्षमे ।
तदीयगौरवाभिज्ञः हंसस्स परमः पतिः ॥ १३ ॥

13. Whom, her lord, the Paramahamsa, conscious of her greatness, could not address as 'you' in singular number.[8]

'शारदाप्रसन्न'-मुख्य-शिष्यजालदेशिकाम् ।
शारदास्वरूपिणीं भजेम बोधरूपिणीम् ॥ १४ ॥

14. May we adore her, the Teacher of pupils like Sarada Prasanna,[9] and the embodiment of knowledge and of the form of Sarasvati.

---

4. See p. 78, *ib.*
5. Lakshminarayan. See p. 81, *ib.*
6. See p. 43, *ib.*
7. See p. 75, *ib.*
8. See p. 79-80, *ib.*
9. See p. 75, *ib.* later Swami Trigunatitananda.

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कांश्चित्संशयिनोऽद्भुतैर्बहुविधैः स्वां दिव्यतां बोधय-
न्त्यन्यानप्यनुगृह्णती सुकृतिनो मन्त्रोपदेशादिभिः ।
आर्तिं सन्निधिमात्रतो व्यपनयन्त्यध्यात्मसूक्तीः किर-
न्त्यासीद्या परहंससत्प्रतिनिधिः तद्ब्रह्मभावात् परम् ॥ १५ ॥

15. Revealing to some in doubt her o divinity through manifold miracul incidents,[10] blessing other fortunate o with the imparting of Mantras e removing distress by her mere presen scattering wise sayings of spiritual w dom, She who was, after the Paran hamsa's attainment of Brahmanho his true representative.

अध्यात्मपद्ममधुवासितमानसान्तः-
पोष्ण्यमानपरहंससदानुयाना ।
नित्यं समुल्लसतु नो हृदि राजहंसी
श्रीशारदा दुरितनाशविशारदा सा ॥ १६ ॥

16. That queen-like swan (Rajahamsi) e sorting for ever that Supreme Sw (Paramahamsa) swimming in the Man lake (mind), fragrant with the hon (bliss) of the lotus of the Spirit, S Sarada who is capable of destroying e may She ever sport in our hearts.

उपचारा इव श्लोकाः षोडशैते समर्पिताः ।
अजरामरभावायाः शतवर्षमहेऽधुना ॥ १७ ॥

17. At the Centenary festival now, to H who has neither age nor death, th sixteen verses are offered like the six *upacharas*[11] of worship!

HYMN TO THE HOLY MOTHER

Swami Virajananda

Living emblem of Motherhood Divine,
Accept this simple worship of Thy son.
Gold or earthly possessions have I none,
But still Thou lovest dearly what is mine.

A steadfast heart, with noble aims inspired,
Which Thou, my Mother, wholly hast possessed
By Thy sweet life, with truth and kindness blest,
With self-forgetting faith and purity fired.

Thy eyes could see no fault in man or beast ;
Nothing could stir Thy patient heart to anger ;
Given to service free that knew no languor,
Thy soul rejoiced to succour even the least.

Thy help, so strong, so certain, so direct,
Alike with sons and strangers quietly shared
In blessing, asked no favour, no reward,
Harboured no thought of rank or race or sect.

Thy heart, wider than space, deep as the Deep,
In wisdom and love the universe enfolds ;
Thy Presence lightens care, our life upholds,
Brings joy and cheer such as no heaven can keep.

10. See for e.g. the case of Girish Chandra Ghosh, the dramatist, pp. 179-80 ; *ib.*
11. A regular worship comprises sixteen offerings or materials of adoration.

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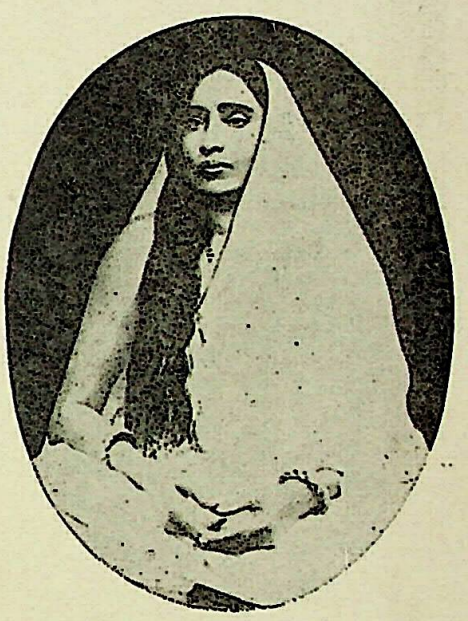
AS THE APOSTLES SAW HER

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Sakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because Sakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Sakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. Dear Brother, you understand little now, but by degrees you will come to know it all. Hence it is her Math that I want first...Without the grace of Sakti nothing is to be accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Sakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in a Sattvika spirit, looking upon Her as their Mother! I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more. Hence we must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons,—can you understand this? ... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me... Please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here, as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessing came and at one bound I cleared the ocean. There, you see, in this terrible winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for Mother's Math. ... [1]



Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda

It is hard to understand Mother's greatness unless she herself reveals it. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna one may recognize the Divine Mother in her. [2]

* * * *

Who can understand our Mother? Even great yogis cannot understand her, what to speak of others. Is it the function of an ordinary being to have digested the worship of an Incarnation like Sri Ramakrishna? From this one has to understand what a great container of power the Mother is. We have been seeing this with our own eyes every—day the Mother has been taking the sins and affliction of many people on herself, and redeeming them. Could anyone else but the Divine Mother Herself have this power? [3]

* * * *

Our Mother is Mahamaya Herself. But such is her Maya that none can understand her. Inside, the ocean of realization; outside, absolute calm. How ordinary and easy she

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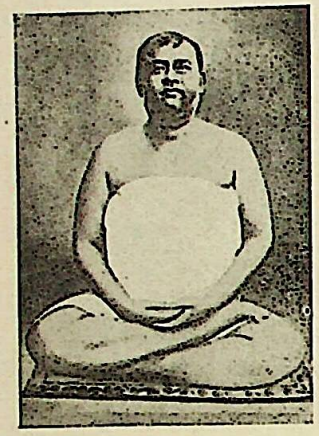
appears? Even the incarnations cannot keep under control such divine moods and devotio One however can somewhat understand Sri Ramakrishna through some inklings. But is extremely difficult to understand the Mother. How s has kept all deluded with her love!



Swami Brahmananda

Ah, boundless is her grace. What a yearning for t jivas! She has been herself calling unto people, cleansing the giving them peace and redeeming them!

If you want the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, first propitia the Mother. The Mother is the supreme Primordial Power Hers (Parama Prakriti). She holds the key of the knowledge Brahman in her hand. Liberation, Bliss and all that are Mother's keeping. There is no difference between Sri Ramakrish and the Mother. Through Mother's grace attainment of liberati becomes easy. [4]

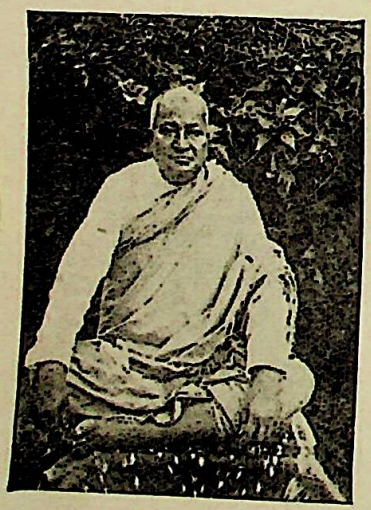
Swami Brahmanan

Is our Mother an ordinary mother? For the good of t world, the Mother of the Universe embodied Herself to give liberation to souls. ... [5]

* * * * *

Only Sri Ramakrishna knew what the Mother was; and Swamiji understood her a certain extent. Swamiji would sometimes even say, 'The Holy Mother is greater than S Ramakrishna',—such was his great regard for the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna once said, 'If t one who is residing at Nahabat (meaning the Holy Mother) is cross with one for some reas it is beyond even my power to save him.' ... Mother, she was the Mother of all. Unbound were her compassion and forgiveness, and wondrous her fortitude! Even our (meaning t direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) understanding of the Mother is so meagre! But she h graciously made us understand this that She is the Divine Mother Herself. One cann understand her real nature unless she graciously makes one understand. [6]

* * * *



Swami Shivananda

Have you read the life of the Holy Mother? She is t ideal of the entire womanhood of this age. Her life is ver wonderful. She assumed this human body and lived like a ordinary housewife. But she was the Primordial Pow Herself, the Mother of the Universe. Sri Ramakrish incarnated himself in human form for establishing t yuga-dharma (the religion of the age). The Mother inca nated herself for fulfilling his mission. How can ordina mortals understand her? In the beginning even we (meanin the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) did not understand h in the least. She used to keep her divinity such a close secret that one could not understand anything about he Mother assumed this human body in order to awaken t entire womanhood of the world. Don't you see, after h advent what amazing awakening has set forth among th womankind of the world. They are now resolved to buil up their lives in all-round gracefulness and to advance i all directions. Not much has been achieved yet. This is just the beginning. As in the Vedi and Pauranic ages there came about the efflorescence of wonderful characters like Gargi

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Maitreyi, Sita, Savitri etc., likewise in this age too there will arise even greater characters among women. A very surprising awakening is swaying women in the fields of spirituality, politics, science, literature etc.. And more awakening will come. This is the play of the Divine Power. Ordinary mortals cannot know the mystery of it all. [7]

Swami Shivananda

Who has understood the Holy Mother? Who can understand her? You have heard about Sita, Savitri, Vishnupriya and Radharani. The Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine powers was noticeable in her. Sri Ramakrishna, however, had the Vidya-powers. Many were the occasions when we witnessed his trances and ecstasies. But in the Holy Mother even the Vidya-powers were elided. What a supreme power that! Victory unto the Mother! Victory unto the Mother! Victory unto the powerful Mother! Don't you see how many people are rushing on! The poison which we cannot digest, we just pass on to the Mother. And she gives refuge to everyone. Infinite is her power! Unbounded her mercy! Victory unto the Mother! What to speak of us—we have not found even Sri Ramakrishna doing this. Even he used to accept people after a lot of testing and screening. And what you find here, in the case of the Mother? Astonishing! Amazing! She is giving refuge to all...and digesting the sins of all. Mother! Mother! Victory unto the Mother!! [8]

Swami Premananda

The exalted Empress has of her own accord appeared as the indigent woman. She sweeps floors, scours vessels, husks paddy and even removes the leavings of devotees after food. She has been undergoing great hardships at Jayrambati in order to teach the householders their duties. Infinite patience, unbounded mercy and above all the negation of even the slightest trace of egoism. [9]

Swami Premananda

Swami Saradananda's book on 'Mother-worship in India' has been dedicated to the Holy Mother with the memorable and significant words, 'By whose gracious look the author has been able to realize the revelation of Divine Motherhood in every female form,—to the lotus feet of her, this work is dedicated in all humility and devotion.' [10]

* * * * *

Once the Swami was questioned by a disciple as to how it was that the Holy Mother took only two or three minutes to initiate a disciple, while he took about half an hour. To this the Swami replied that the very touch or the will of the Holy Mother was sufficient assurance that the disciple had surrendered to, and accepted by the Master, whereas in his case some time must be spent in meditation before he received that assurance. [11]

* * * * *

A friend: I have lived so long in the company of the Mother and you all, but how is it that I cannot understand the Mother in the least?

Swami Saradananda: What can we understand of the Mother! This, however, I can say that I have never seen such a great mind, and I do not hope to see. It is not within our capacity to comprehend the extent of Mother's glory and power. I have never seen in any one such attachment, nor have I seen such detachment. She was so deeply attached to Radhu. But when her last day came she said, 'Please send her away.' I said, 'Mother, you are now telling that Radhu should be sent away. But what will happen when you

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will like to see her again?' Mother replied, 'No, I have not the slightest attractio for her any more.'

Swami Saradananda

While talking about the Holy Mother in such a strai Swami Saradananda became absorbed in her thought and bega to hum a song, the purport of which is as follows:

> Amazed to witness your antics, I am musing as to whethe I should laugh or weep. In the strange fair of the world you mak and unmake things all day long even as children do. I hav lived long by your side and followed you. Let me now acknow ledge my defeat—I could not understand you. [12]

* * * *

A Devotee: Maharaj, by seeing his divine state o being I can well have the faith that Sri Ramakrishna was Go Himself. But how is it that I cannot comprehend the Mothe (Sri Sarada Devi) as the Divine Mother Herself?

Swami Saradananda: If at all you have succeeded i believing that Sri Ramakrishna is God Himself, whence the does this doubt arise at all?

Devotee: Somehow this doubt does not leave me.

Swami Saradananda: Then you have not been able to correctly comprehend Sr Ramakrishna as the Incarnation of God.

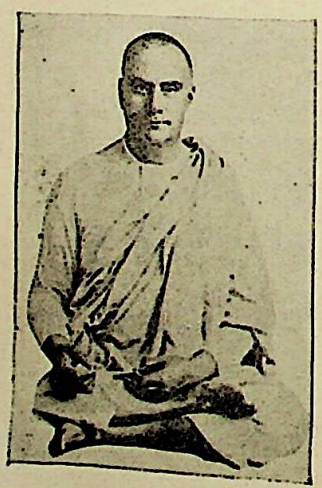
Devotee (humbly): Excuse me Maharaj, I have that faith in Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Saradananda (firmly): Do you then mean to say that God married the daughte of a cow-dung-cake-gathering woman? [13]

Swami Saradanand

Citing an analogy of Brahman and Maya, Sri Ramakrishna has said,

> 'Rama walks in front, Sita in the middle and Lakshmana behind. Sita is the veiling Maya wh screens off Lakshmana, the Jiva. If she stands slightly aside Lakshmana can see Sri Ramachandra who is indivisible Brahman.'



Swami Abhedananda

She, who is Sita, she who is Sri Radha, she who is the Primordia Power Kali, she incarnated herself in this age in the form o Sri Sarada Devi. Prayers please the Mother Peaceful. She i Vidya-maya. By taking refuge in her one gets rid of the darkness of Avidya-maya. When the Mother is propitiated, Sri Rama krishna, being pleased, showers his grace on the devotee. [14]

The Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna used to mutually consider the other as Mother. When Sri Ramakrishna entered Mahasamadhi in the Kasipur garden house, that heart-rending news was not communicated to the Mother on that very night. As I was the youngest among the intimate devotees of the Master, the Mother did not hesitate to talk with me freely. So it fell upon me to convey the news to her in the morning. On hearing the news the Mother cried out, 'O Mother, where are you gone!' I do not know whether any other example is available in the world of such supernatural and mysterious relationship between husband and wife. [15]

....The Holy Mother is Saraswati Herself, the bestower of knowledge; she again is Mahamaya, the giver of liberation. [16]

Swami Abhedanand

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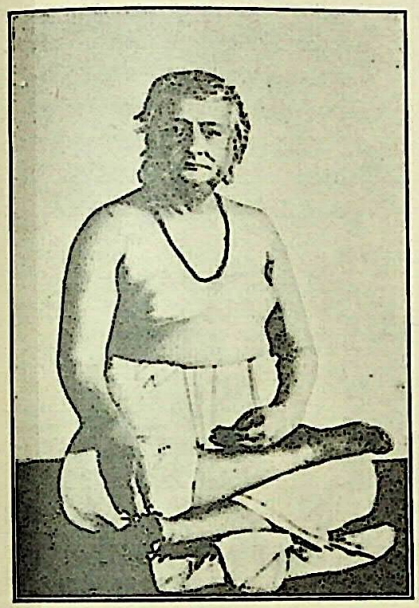
When a devotee said that he had the *darsan* of the Holy Mother, Swami Akhandananda remarked: 'When you had the darsan of the Holy Mother, the same result of having the darsan of Sri Ramakrishna will accrue to you. To have had the darsan of the Mother or the Master is the same thing.' [17]



Swami Akhandananda

Swami Akhandananda

Immediately after establishing the Math Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) installed there the dust of Mother's feet, which is being worshipped in the Belur Math even today. As long as the Math will be there, this worship will go on. Only Swamiji understood the Mother. None else had the idea that she was Lakshmi Herself. Whom to tell all these things! To comprehend her grace one requires a lot of austerities. Your regard for the Mother is mere talk! To understand her one has to practise austerities. Then will flow her grace, by which one can know her. It is then one's claim to the effect that one knows the Mother is fruitful.

* * * *

Make the Mother your ideal. No use coming to me. The Mother herself is there to know whom I have been sitting here. It is a great good fortune that you have received the Mother's instructions. Where can one find such renunciation as in the Mother?

What at all shall I say to the Mother? She comes to know everything. My that Mother of Dakshineswar! Is there any comparison to Mother's grace? Does the Mother expect anything from us? No expectation, only selfless compassion—she gives refuge to all so that they may remember God at least in the morning and evening and lead pure lives. Look at this boy who cannot speak and has no home; even him the Mother has blessed.

* * * *

Swami Adbhutananda

You have been with me for such a long time. I write letters to so many people. You could have asked me why I do not write to the Mother. Do you know why I do not write to the Mother? Mother knows my past, future and everything. What is the point in writing to her just for a public show? What is the necessity of writing to one who knows everything about my past, present and future? One has to write to them, who do not understand.

I do not speak about the Mother in all and sundry places, because all won't understand or they will rather misunderstand. I generally talk about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Will the Mother become a stranger to me just because I do not go to see her? You ask, how do I look upon the Mother: She is Mother Lakshmi, again, she is sometimes Sita. [18]

Swami Adbhutananda

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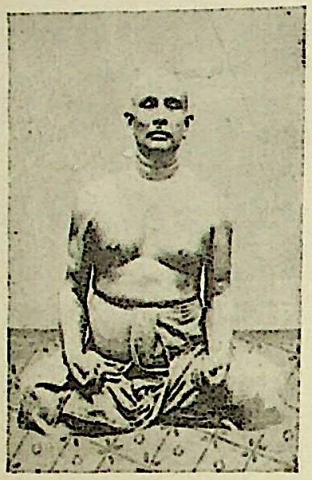

Swami Turiyananda

It is a news of great joy that the Holy Mother is soo coming to Calcutta. Numberless people will be relieved of the lives' afflictions at her feet. Blessed is the Mother's Grac How great is her fortitude! Not the slightest trace of anno yance about her. Day and night, incessantly people are comin and she is doing good to them unstintedly. [19]

You have evinced very good an attitude by placing yo son at the feet of the Mother for some time. Life becom blessed when one succeeds in dedicating at her feet one's all, wife, wealth, relatives and even oneself. They of themselv fulfil the desires of devotees. [20]

Swami Turiyananda

The incident took place in Bangalore during the Ho Mother's pligrimage in South India. The Mother was stayi in the Bangalore Ashrama. There is a small hillock behind t Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dusk, the Moth climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of t setting sun. When this news reached Swami Ramakrishnananda, he was immediately tra ported to a new region and said in amazement, 'Indeed! the Mother has become a dwell on the mountain' (*parvata-vasini* which is a name of the Divine Mother dwelling on t Himalayas or Vindhya hills) and he hurried towards the plac He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed even that l hillock. But regardless of that he went up straight to t Mother, prostrated there and laying his head on her feet chant his three well known verses from the *Chandi* which are us as Mantras for the salutation of the Divine Mother:

Swami Ramakrishnananda

O Auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousnes Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art t giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautif form. O, Thou Power Divine salutations to Thee.

O Eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, maintenance a destruction. Thou art the abode of all qualities and yet beyo them. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

O Mother, Thou ever savest those in poverty and pain, w take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of the misery of a O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee. [21]

Swami Ramakrishnanand

One has to acknowledge the fact that those men and women who received the grace the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna could not do so without a lot austerities in the previous lives.

* * * * *

The *pujaris* perform imitation *anna-kuta* (distribution of rice in huge quantities whereas how great is the anna-kuta of the real Mother of the universe, who is feeding human beings and other jivas of the world! When one reflects on this, one does not qui know whither one's mind moves away from the body. Sri Ramakrishna would sometim say, this time Mahamaya Herself has come on a sojourn in human form. When all a sundry will flock around her, She will disappear.

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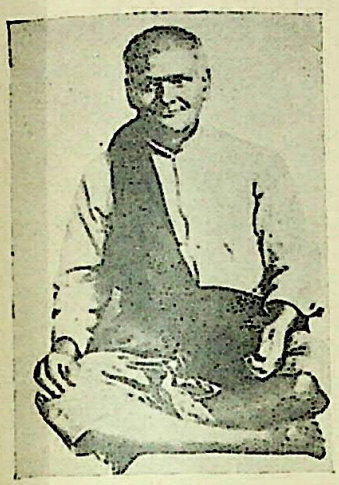

Swami Subodhananda

Know it for certain that when the Holy Mother has blessed you from that very moment your fate is changed. Many people even now deeply regret that they could not have the *darsan* of the Mother. Only he can understand Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother to whom they reveal themselves. The sun can be seen only with sunlight. It is by their grace and compassion that men can know them and have their *darsan*. If you can make the Mother your own, through Her grace you will attain everything.

* * * * *

The Holy Mother was previously living in her human body. Now the Mother resides in the hearts of every son and daughter and all devotees. The more one will meditate on the Mother and Sri Ramakrishna, the more one will come to know of them. Those who have once talked or associated with them can never forget their love in life. Parents just do no know how to love like them. [22]

Swami Subodhananda

... I repeat the Mother's name as 'Ma Anandamayi.' Through the power of her name one can attain everything—devotion, faith, intellect, wealth and opulence etc.. In the *Chandi* it is said She can grant prosperity and success and all. I derive more strength from the Mother's name than from Sri Ramakrishna's. Once Swamiji (Vivekananda) happened to be at the house of Balaram Babu. The Holy Mother too was there. Everyone was going to offer their salutations to the Mother. I was just sitting near Swamiji. Swamiji asked me to go and prostrate before the Mother. I went and did my salutation touching the ground with bent knees and head. I did not quite know that Swamiji had followed me. Seeing me saluting the Mother in that fashion he remonstrated, 'Is that the way of prostrating before the Mother?' Saying this he threw himself full length on the ground at the feet of the Mother. Seeing that, I too at once followed suit. Mother is our very own. The mind is in eternal obedience before her. [23]

* * *

You must look upon Sri Ramakrishna and the Mother with an eye of non-differentiation. Remember, one cannot realize the Mother without the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and vice versa. Sri Ramakrishna is as it were Narayana, and the Mother, Lakshmi. One has to ask for strength before the Mother. Without strength nothing can be achieved. [24]

Swami Vijnanananda

Look upon the Master and the Holy Mother as one and non-different. Always keep in mind that one cannot reach the Holy Mother without the grace of the Master and the Master without the grace of the Holy Mother. The Master is as it were Lord Narayana, and the Holy Mother, the Goddess Lakshmi. Pray to Holy Mother for infinite power. For nothing worth the name can be achieved without Sakti.

The Master is indeed Rama and Krishna. And the Holy Mother is no other than Sita and Yogamaya. This time the Master's advent on earth was in a disguised form. [25]

Swami Vijnanananda

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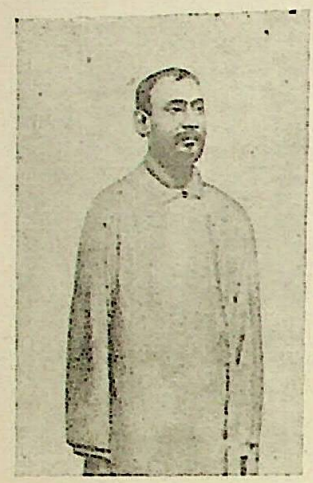

Swami Yogananda

We of little faith and limited understanding can hard appreciate the grace and blessings of the Master that ha descended on us in disguise, in spite of the sorrow of separati We saw how the Holy Mother, even in the midst of her inte grief at the demise of the Master, fully realized his divine gra and presence at all times. We thought ourselves as helple orphans, but the Mother's love became our sheet-anchor. [26]

* * * *

At Brindavan the Holy Mother had many spiritu experiences. One day her lady companions found her absorb in deep Samadhi. They uttered the name of the Lord in h ears and tried to bring her mind down. I then repeated t name of Ramakrishna with all my might and strength of voi and then the Mother seemed to come down to the ordina sense-plane. During such periods of ecstasy, the Mother manner of speech, her voice, her way of taking food, h mode of walking and her general behaviour were exactly li those of the Master. We have heard that in deep meditation the worshipper and the worshi ped become one. The scriptures mention a spiritual state known as *tādātmya-bhāva*, being one with God. We have read in the *Bhagavata* how the Gopis, unable to bear the separati from Krishna, became so deeply absorbed in the thought of Him that they forgot for the m ment their own individualities and behaved as if each of them were a Krishna by herself. I the same manner the Mother too forgot her own separate existence and acted just like t Master, feeling her oneness with him. When I put to her some intricate questions about spi tual matters, shortly after her states of Samadhi, she replied in a God-intoxicated mood, ve much like Sri Ramakrishna, that is, in the same manner characteristic of the Master, usi even the same easy style of expression with metaphors and parables.

We all were surprised to see the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna unified with her. It w unique. We realized that the Master and the Mother were one in essence, though appeari in separate forms. Is it not said in the scriptures, 'Lord, thou art man, thou art woma (*tvam stri tvam pumān asi*)? The Master told me many times that there was no difference be ween his body and that of the Mother.

Nearly two days passed in that superconscious state. A great transformation can over the Mother after that experience. Thenceforward she was seen to remain always immers in bliss. All her sorrow and grief and her feeling of separation from the Master vanishe A serene, blissful mood took their place. She sometimes behaved like a simple, innocent gi of young age. Sometimes she would be eager to go to the various temples of Brindavan f *darsan* or to visit holy spots on the banks of the Jamuna associated with the divine sport Krishna and the Gopis. She was then in such a blissful state of mind that at times he yearning for Krishna's presence and her utterance of His name with intense love reminded u of Radha. I have heard from Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma that the Mother at times frankl spoke of herself, expressing the view that she was Radha. She passed her time in constant med tation and Japa and would often go into ecstasy, remaining self-forgetful for hours togethe We accompanied Mother to Hardwar. There her mood was quite different. Like an ord nary pilgrim she offered worship at all the temples on the banks of the Ganges. But at the sigh of the Himalayas she stood speechless. She liked Brindavan more and returned there soo While at Brindavan, by the grace of the Mother I could understand and appreciate th divine *lila* (sport) of Krishna. [27]

Swami Yogana

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SRI SARADA

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE RAMAKRISHNA-IDEAL

'What is Sri Ramakrishna, That I am.'

HOLY MOTHER

I

Some one said one day to the Holy Mother:

'Mother, what a unique thing our Master gave to the world: he has established the harmony of religions.'

To this the Mother replied:

'My child, what you say about the harmony of religions is true. But it never seemed to me that he had practised different religions with any definite motive of preaching harmony of religions. Day and night he remained overwhelmed with the ecstatic thought of God. He enjoyed the sport of the Divine by practising spiritual disciplines, following the paths of the Vaishnavas, Christians, Mussalmans and the rest. But it seems to me, my child, that the special feature of the Master's life is his renunciation. Has any one ever seen such renunciation?'

Following the light of this revelation should we enter into the heart of that understanding whence it emanated, we would possibly get a glimpse of the Ramakrishna-ideal in its essential form. No denying the fact that harmony of religions and other precious imports and inspirations emanate from his spiritual experiences and teachings. But they were, as it were, by-products of the main Ganga-flow of his life. Sri Ramakrishna knew nothing but God. Or rather he knew everything as God, in God and for God. His was a single passion and that was love for God. This love was the entire motive force of all his talks and actions. It brought him to new ventures, strange experiments and association the results of which were consigned to the flames of that love again.

It was this love—which is synonymous with 'renunciation'—which Sri Ramakrishna inflamed in the soul of Sri Sarada with the fire of his own soul. Is it even correct to say so? Was not Sri Sarada born with this very love? If she had not that love how could she understand Sri Ramakrishna? How could she so boldly declare that she had gone to Dakshineswar to help him achieve his desired goal of life? How could she help him in achieving his goal which was love of God unless God was her beloved?

Yet Sri Ramakrishna left nothing to chance. As far as Sri Sarada was concerned he seemed to have blue-prints ready. It was he who picked the Sarada of five from obscurity as his bride. Whenever chance brought them together he took the greatest care to educate her as to the ways of the world and the spirit. He gave her that education which was the 'manifestation of perfection already in' her. After marriage he had prayed to the Divine Mother that even the least possible tinge of *kāma* should be removed from the mind of Sarada. Later on Sri Ramakrishna had occasion to acknowledge with gratitude to what a degree his spiritual attainments were due to the immaculate partnership of Sri Sarada. When after coming of age Sarada had appeared before her God-intoxicated husband, Sri Ramakrishna offered her the fullest right of a wife and submitted himself, his future, his mission at her mercy. Sri Sarada at once rose exalted to the heights of his life's requirement

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To this the Holy Mother replied,

'Is it to be wondered at? He picked up the best types, and with what care he selected them! And towards me he has pushed all this small fry, coming in their hundreds like ants! Don't compare my disciples with his!'

Let us not compare 'ants' with giants, following the advice of the Mother. What is material to us, mostly 'ants', is that none of us was denied his little particles of saving sugar. It was not without reason, ecstatic Nag Mahashaya frantically declared to all that the Mother (Holy Mother) was more compassionate than the Father (Sri Ramakrishna).

And what did it all mean to the Holy Mother? With her rheumatic body in failing health she had to regularly pass half the night seated in prayers and japam for the sake of those who had taken refuge in her but won't do anything at all by way of spiritual exercises.

Looking after the spiritual destiny of these 'ants' was not as easy a job as some might suppose for among those also came virulent types of sinners and miscreants. But the Mother gave shelter to all. Referring to this unique compassion of the Mother Swami Premananda said:

'Don't you see how many are rushing to be blessed by her? We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we cannot ourselves take. She is giving refuge to everybody accepting the sins of all and digesting them...Unlimited power! Boundless compassion! What to speak of us, we have not seen even Sri Ramakrishna doing this.'

IV

In Sri Sarada the perfection of Sri Ramakrishna attained a superiority of its own. Through her, remote Ramakrishna appeared at the very centre of every home and heart. But for her, Sri Ramakrishna would have remained too lofty an ideal, a despair of men and women of the world with all their limitations, follies and smallnesses. He, of course, appeared to be in the very thick of *samsara*, so near Calcutta. But the truth remained that Sri Ramakrishna smacked too much of the blue of Brahman in which he was ever immersed. He pulled but he estranged. He always walked the ground that was God. And that was no walking on our ground at all. Notwithstanding his intimate and unusual knowledge of the world and infinite compassion for men, he always lived in a world that was his own.

But to our great good fortune the Holy Mother always lived in this our very own world. She was our cooking, scouring, serving, nursing, suffering mother who knew and entered into every problem of our homes. There she remained in the centre of our homes, of our world, a normal being but with perfect possession of the knowledge of Brahman. This was a tremendous event before our eyes in the spiritual history of mankind.

Like that pitcher of bliss which the Holy Mother always felt placed in her heart in the Dakshineswar days, Sri Ramakrishna established Sri Sarada herself in the very heart of our sorry world as a full pitcher of transmuting bliss which would help sublimate the distracted humanity from within.

Who has not been soothed to look upon that portrait of purity itself? Who has not been less impure by remembering her name? Who has not been emboldened by reflecting on the all-conquering silence of her soul? Who has not been less ignorant by the power of her wisdom? Who has not been less miserable in the expanse of her all-enfolding compassion? Who has not been more loving through the energy of her forgiveness and service?

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Sri Ramakrishna always remained outside the periphery of our clumsy world and delivered his message from there. He was the 'homa' bird of the open and poured his melodies over the skies. He was truly the 'uncle moon'. So dear but so distant. He could not be caught in the dinginess of our suffocating world. When he was brought for treatment to a rented house in Durgacharan Mukherjee street, Baghbazar, he just walked out of the house and straight went to Balaram's house saying, 'Have they brought me here as they do with dying people in their last moments?'; whereas the Holy Mother lived in the Nahabat almost in conditions of imprisonment for years with the 'pitcher of bliss' in her heart, and pitchers of stores around her and above her head too. This contrast between the Master and the Holy Mother is interesting, characteristic and symbolic. What we did not find in one regard in Ramakrishna we were to find in the Holy Mother. She was to show by herself living how we were to live in this clumsy consuming world of hundred little exacting problems of daily life, keeping God alone as the light, solace and goal of life and thus illustrating Sri Ramakrishna's own theories and principles and proving their acceptability.

In the fold of our every folly, in the chinks of our every crackishness, in the twists of our every crookedness, in the flames of our every desire, in the mouth of every gaping wound, in the bruises of our every frustration, she quitely passed on that healing balm of her life, that redeeming knowledge of which she was the incarnation. Her renunciation and her service forsook the high ways of grand achievements and entered in hundred quiet streams all the forsaken blind alleys, by-lanes and backyards of life pulling people up in the manner of a blade of grass lifting an insect. And this was a perfection which Sri Ramakrishna dreamed and realized especially in Sri Sarada.

Sri Sarada gave honour to every vessel we use in our kitchen. She said that even the broom deserved our respect. She fingered out that even our domestic cat had the seat of God on its head; our pet parrot had but the same Lord within its heart. She granted its prestige even to the basket we throw away. She emphasized the inalienable right of the cow over the peelings of vegetables and said that it was our duty to hold them before the mouth of the cow. Her consideration for the lowliest, her *shraddha* for the veriest insignificant of the world was a significant exemplification of the truths solemnly declared in our scriptures. We had all heard of legendary Janaka and his royal wisdom. His majesty shone off well in the dim distant palace of Mithila. But our thatched cottages, our unbearable homes and societies consisting of indifferents, miserables, crooks, off-heads, misanthropes and neurotics required one other example. And that we saw in Sri Sarada.

Paradoxically enough this supreme act of Self-simplification was but the ideal idealization of the Ramakrishna-ideal which reached its consummation in the Holy Mother.

V

After his realizations were complete the Divine Mother asked Sri Ramakrishna to remain in '*Bhava-mukha*', in the border-land of the absolute and relative, for the good of the world. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and the Order of Sri Ramakrishna were the outcome of such a wonderful stay of Sri Ramakrishna in the world in his post-sadhana days. In the Holy Mother we saw another variety of stay in 'Bhava-mukha' which consolidated

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every gift to humanity which flowed from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Out of the intimations of the Infinite which Sri Ramakrishna brought home, the Holy Mother served home-made cakes and sweets and dishes to feed her children with.

The story as to how the Ramakrishna-ideal got formed into the monastic organization which bears his name is well-known to many. But few knew who ensouled the Order with the living spirit of Sri Ramakrishna after his passing away. It was his alter-ego, Sri Sarada. Swami Vivekananda knew it well that when his visions and actions received the authentication from the Mother, then and then alone he was perfectly right in his ventures. And therefore no step which did not have her blessings was taken. In every one of his ventures Swami Vivekananda found in the Mother a dynamic and inexhaustible source of strength and stability. What she gave to the Order was the direction unerring of the spirit of Ramakrishna, that she was in herself, its light and its confirmation.

To dry theoreticians she brought home by the power of her simple sublime living the supreme necessity of world-encompassing comprehensive spirituality. To the erring aspirant she gave the knock of awakening in Sri Ramakrishna. In the one-sided she opened the other sides of awareness. To the morbid austere she held up the essence of the true ideal. On the camplacent she impressed the beauty and efficacy of austerity in spiritual life. To differing disciples she remained the Mother magnanimous where all contradictions, oppositions and knots of hearts melted into creative understanding. To those in the fold who failed to fully grasp the new ideal and were restive to run away to the ancient caves and forests of traditional unconcern she said pointedly:

'Where do you mean to go just for counting the winds? Come, work for my sake for the sake of the Master. Is it lesser than practising austerities?'

'Ah, running away for fear of things sour and coming to settle down under the veriest tamarind tree! Fine indeed!',

was her revealing and healing incision up on those who became inordinately attached to particular places and ambitions and tended to turn Ashramas into 'second samsaras.' To those who always tended to break into waves she inculcated attention to the fathoms of the ocean and the pearly bed at the bottom. To the suppressed, oppressed and obsessed she extended the recouping indulgence of her Motherhood, which was the Godhood of Sri Ramakrishna.

Even thundering Vivekananda and lofty Brahmananda quivered before her feet. But the neophyte of that day knew that she was the surest protection when angry gods held out terrible bolts and little pardon. She laid the highest emphasis on the point that the Ramakrishna Order was not a brick and mortar affair but it was a spiritual family which had grown and extended through love and love alone, vertical love for God and horizontal love for man. It was this love for God and man this central flame of Ramakrishna's soul that everyone had to guard within his own soul. There alone lay the good of the Order and the world. When conflict arose between the Ramakrishna-persuasion and the Vivekananda-pull she was the perfect point of introspection and reconciliation whence alone both could be simultaneously correctly understood.

The very core of the Order, she remained outside its circumference away with the world which was sore with afflictions and thus she guided the Order to become an expression of Sri Ramakrishna stay in 'Bhava-mukha.'

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What she was most anxious that the whole Order must cherish, cultivate and communicate was the ever-blazing realization that Sri Ramakrishna was a living concern. He was not to become a dead God granite, but one's very *own* of the soul, living with every heart-beat. This was precisely the Ramakrishna-ideal—Ramakrishna's ideal of living in God, with God, for God—the ideal of living-God. The Holy Mother blazed Sri Ramakrishna wherever she went, in whatever she did. It was impossible for her to act dissociated from God her beloved, her Ramakrishna. And what she did she became. The identification was sometimes so vivid that even her slant of voice, mode of behaviour would indicate that through her Sri Ramakrishna alone lived on. And we know that she lived on for Sri Ramakrishna alone. Recounting reminiscences of the times just after the passing away of the Master she once said:

> 'When the Master passed away, I also wanted to leave my body. He appeared before me and said, "No, you must remain here, There are many things to be done." I myself realized later on that this was true. I had so many things to do.'

This having 'so many things to do' has to be understood in the context of what she was. And what she was could not be understood if Sri Ramakrishna himself had not cared to reveal her identity. He said in so many clear unequivocal words:

> 'She is the giver of Knowledge. Is she an ordinary being? She is my Sakti.'

And his Sakti was his, 'My Mother Anandamayi', who said in so many words,

> 'I look upon him as my child,' and 'as father, mother, brother, friend and all in all.'

In this mutuality of abstractions it is but natural that our common understanding should get bewildered. But ultimately what emerges out of computation and imputation of human relationship between them, is the ultimate Identity that they were.

> 'Look upon Sri Ramakrishna and myself with an eye of non-differentiation,'

said the Holy Mother.

A disciple asked,

> 'Mother, after the passing away of the Master, we find you living in the world and teaching humanity. But no other Consort (Sakti) of the previous Avataras is heard to have acted like this? In case of other Avataras their devotee-companions alone carried on the work of teaching people. Why this newness in your case?'

The Holy Mother replied:

> 'My child, you know that the Master used to see the Divine Mother in every one. He left me behind this time for teaching Motherhood of God to humanity.'

VI

If Sri Ramakrishna's estimate about the Holy Mother and her own estimate about herself have to be properly valued, and if the ideal of Motherhood of God is an ideal for both men and women, we may submit with due deference to the great Sister Nivedita that the following remark of hers about the Holy Mother, which has become very popular, seems to us to be somewhat inadequate:

> 'To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.'

Boys of the Mother the world over must beware! Here's fine ruse for misappropriation of the Mother by her daughters!!

That apart. If Sri Ramakrishna chose to speak any word, and that too the final word about the ideal of womanhood, it is difficult to imagine, from the context of his entire message as we know it, that he should have chosen to speak the final word about the ideal of Indian woman-

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hood alone. This is not to say that in the Holy Mother we do not find the highest manifestation of the ideal of Indian womanhood. What we mean to suggest here is that the Holy Mother can be any day counted the final word as to the ideal of world womanhood. That ideal which would be geographically limited only to India, could not be, in the ultimate analysis, the ideal of Indian womanhood even. It is not a matter of theory alone. We find her today accepted as the ideal by thinking women in many countries of the world.

And again, if the Holy Mother were to be the ideal of world womanhood only, she should have been short of what she actually is. Was Motherhood of God meant only for women? If the Holy Mother holds aloft and represents any ideal, it is the ideal of God-centered, God-circumferenced, God-soaked life, which is verily the Ramakrishna-ideal.

It was not as if the Ramakrishna-ideal was exclusively perfected in Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother somehow approximated it. Did not Sri Sarada herself declare:

'What Sri Ramakrishna is, That I am'!

What the Holy Mother is, is the Ramakrishna-ideal, nay the very consummation of it.

I SAW HER IN TWILIGHT

Swami Virajananda

Towards the end of the summer of 1893 the Holy Mother was staying in a garden-house at Belur which had been rented by the devotees for her. The first floor of the house had one single room and this was for Mother. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma also lived with her. Swami Yogananda who was in charge of the household stayed in the drawing room below and so did Swami Trigunatita, doing most of the out-door work such as marketing etc.. Our Math was then at Alambazar. Someone or other of the Swamis would now and then go to see the Mother and spend a day or two in the house. The number of devotees then was very small; hence she could enjoy a very quiet life.

A few days after her being settled in the house I took the opportunity to have her *darsan*. I had gone from the Alambazar Math. This was my second meeting[1]. After I had prostrated at her feet the Holy Mother said,—'Stay on here tonight.' I obeyed. Next morning as I went to take leave of her, very affectionately she said, 'My son, this time I am very much pained to see you. What a nice plumpy body you had formerly. Repeated attacks of malarial fever have now brought your health to such an emaciated condition. Well, you have joined the monastery, but you know, those people there are penniless fakirs. How can they procure the requisite nutritious food for you? What necessary care for your health is possible there? So I say, go back to your home and stay there till you can recoup your health with proper diet and medicine.'

I was least prepared for these words of the Mother. Simply astounded I could not utter anything for some time. After

1. The writer had first met the Holy Mother and lived with her for some time at Jayrambati in autumn, 1892. For an account of this visit see the writer's reminiscences published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1954 (The Holy Mother Birth Centenary Number)

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a while collecting myself somehow, I said —'Mother, you are asking me to go home. Well, what will be my occupation there?'

'Why,' replied the Holy Mother, 'meditation, Japa, Puja and study of the scriptures—you can well pass your time with these.'

Coming downstairs I could not resist my tears. I went to a secluded corner of the garden and wept bitterly. And then sitting alone in the drawing-room I felt as if overwhelming clouds had surrounded me. That tiger's den of a home! The very thought of returning there once again seemed to be a stroke of lightning on my head.

Swami Yogananda came there presently and Golap-Ma described to him what happened.

> 'Mother was pained to see Kalikrishna emaciated and that is why she asked him to spend sometime at his home. But she herself feels very sorry to have given this injunction. She was saying to me—"Ah! I was really shocked to see the boy's shattered health. He had repeated attacks of fever. The poor meals of the Math too were uncongenial to his health. So I told him to go home and take good food so that he might recoup his health. But my words have afflicted him and my eyes too are wet with tears"'

Swami Yogananda consoled me and asked if I had my *Diksha* (initiation). 'No, I have not had any such thing,' was my reply.

'Then why did you not ask Mother what meditation and Japa you were to do at home?' said he. 'Well, ask her tomorrow after your bath.'

These words of the Swami were to me a revelation. I did not know till then that the Holy Mother gave initiation to anybody. My friend Khelat had it before at Jayrambati as I learnt afterwards, but he did not disclose it to us. The Holy Mother was particularly compassionate towards him when she heard that the young man was an orphan. Later on many others of our group were initiated by the Mother, but each made it a point to keep the matter a secret! Afterwards it was found out that save and except Sudhir (Swami Shuddhananda) everyone of our group received the '*Mantra*' from the Mother.

However as per the instructions of Swami Yogananda, I went to the Mother next morning after she had finished her Puja and put to her the tutored question. The Holy Mother then initiated me formally. The 'Mantra' that she gave me for Japa and meditation did not tune with the particular aspect of *sadhana* I was following so far. So I was a little confused and asked her bluntly,—'Mother, I have been meditating on God in such and such manner and that gives me great satisfaction.' 'No, my son, what you have received from me is better for you'—was her short reply. And strange! these words, as soon as they came from her mouth effected a miracle. I felt within myself an instantaneous transformation of my outlook of sadhana. The former sentiments all vanished and the new 'ideal' held before me by the Mother filled my being completely with a mighty inspiration and ineffable peace. Returning home no longer seemed to have a terror for me but appeared to be just an opportunity for intensive spiritual sadhana for a certain period. Swami Yogananda was very glad to learn that I had received regular initiation from the Holy Mother.

I spent the whole day at Mother's place and was to depart for the Alambazar Math at dusk. It was July, right the middle of rains in Bengal. The Ganga was full to the brim. A thick mist had enve-

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loped the atmosphere and the evening darkness was to follow soon. It was drizzling. Suddenly I felt a sob deep in my heart. So the monastery full of joy and peace was soon to recede from me temporarily though! Mother had of course blessed and assured me—still there was a sort of restless feeling within. The gloomy inclement weather outside just represented my state of mind then. With a heavy heart I went to Mother and said, 'Mother, so I will take leave of you now.' 'Yes, my son,' she said, 'it is time. Well, come here now and then. See that the body gets strong.' She then touched my chin by way of motherly blessing. I went out of the house and got on the boat at the ferry ghat close by. The boat plying northward passed in front of the garden-house. I that background of twilight I looked a the Mother's room on the terrace. Sh was standing on the open terrace with he gaze fixed towards the Ganga—on th boat! So long as the house was visibl from the boat I found her in the sam position. My heart surged with emotion and tears came out in profusion. Late on I learnt that when Golap-Ma had pro tested her standing that way in the drizz ling rain, she said, her eyes wet with tear —'Oh, I am thinking how very sad the boy must be feeling. So I am looking at him

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A SMALL INCIDENT IN THE HOLY MOTHER'S LIFE

Swami Sankarananda

It is exceedingly difficult for many to realise the divinity or the inborn godliness of our Holy Mother. Even Swami Brahmananda said that we could never have appreciated her in the least unless Sri Ramakrishna had inculcated in us as to who she really was. Swami Vivekananda wrote from America:

> 'To me Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace—Mother's blessings are all paramount to me...'

Also,

> 'I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessings came and at one bound I cleared the ocean.'

The Holy Mother never allowed her innate divinity to manifest in the least and always went on with her daily work of a lady's life with utter perfection.

There are various instances that are depicted in her life no doubt, but there are so many that are yet unknown. Her services from tender age up to the last moment were marvellous and always drew the highest estimation from her relatives sons of the monastic Order as well as from householder devotees. Her love embraced all without the least distinction of caste colour and creed. She was so loving, considerate and watchful in her daily life that nothing ever escaped her attention to bring forth the least comment.

Once while the Holy Mother was staying at her house at 1, Udbodhan Lane, Bagh bazar, it so happened that on a Sunday the Master's niece Lakshmi (known as Lak shmi-Didi) came in the afternoon at about 3 p.m. with three other devotees. Lakshmi Didi and others saw the Holy Mother and paid their respects. The Holy Mother told her: 'Yogin-Ma is laid up with fever. Just go and see her.' Lakshmi-Didi went and saw Yogin-Ma who had high fever at that time. After coming out from Yogin-Ma's room she went away with her compa

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nions to Entally (in Southern Calcutta) where *Utsava* of Sri Ramakrishna was being celebrated.

A little while later the Holy Mother inquired about Lakshmi-Didi and came to know that she had left. The Holy Mother then inquired whether she was entertained with some *Prasad* but none could reply in the affirmative. At this the Holy Mother felt highly perturbed, perhaps for the reason that Lakshmi was the incarnation of Shitala Devi. This was so declared by Sri Ramakrishna who always behaved with his little niece in a way pleasing to her. Thinking that her displeasure may bring some mishap in the house, the Holy Mother at once called on a boy and asked him to go to Entally Utsava with a good piece of cloth and two rupees for sweets to be given to Lakshmi-Didi with the words: 'The Holy Mother had expected that you would see her before coming away. She is sorry that she could not entertain you and so has sent this for you.'

The boy found Lakshmi-Didi at Entally Ashrama surrounded by a good number of ladies. He cautiously pushed his way through and after bowing with great reverence submitted what the Holy Mother had instructed him. Lakshmi-Didi was as much pleased as she felt abashed for not having taken leave of the Holy Mother before coming away. She said, 'As there were others with me who were anxious to come here, I forgot to take her permission. Anyhow give my love and *pranams* to the Holy Mother and tell her that I would pass a whole day with her.'

The boy came back and reported all that Lakshmi-Didi had said and at this the Holy Mother felt much relieved. The Holy Mother was highly pleased when Lakshmi-Didi came and passed the day with her two or three days later.

MY MOST MOTHERLY MOTHER

Swami Vishuddhananda

It was only when I came in contact with the Holy Mother I was fortunate enough to realize for the first time in my life what was meant by unmotivated love. Only those who have tasted this love know its nature. One cannot express it in words. The power of her unearthly love attracted my young heart so tremendously that in no time all the collective pull of affections of parents and relatives naturally lagged behind.

I saw the Mother for the first time at Jayrambati about half a century ago. I used to reside in Calcutta and frequent Dakshineswar, where I would often meet Revered 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and Sri Sarat Chandra Chakravarty, an initiated disciple of Swami Vivekananda. There under the Panchavati or the Bilwa tree I would often be the listener of talks on Sri Ramakrishna. On coming to know of the Mother from Sri Sarat Chandra Chakravarty, a yearning for the *darsan* and the grace of the Mother grew in my heart.

I went to Jayrambati via Burdwan, I remember. It was an arduous journey to which was added a mishap at Kamarpukur which threw my mind into turmoil. Limbs tired, mind exhausted, I was thinking as to how fine it would be if someone guided my steps to the Mother and introduced me to her. How to approach her alone was my greatest worry. What were I to

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say to her, when I ultimately approached this much revered lady, the consort of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna? What sort of reception awaited me? My mind was agitated with such thoughts. But all anxiety and misgivings vanished in a moment as I appeared before the Mother. 'How do you do, my child?', the Mother asked me at sight. 'Was the journey comfortable?' I was the recepient of exactly that warm treatment which a son returning home after a long time receives from his mother!

Quite a few times I had the good fortune of seeing her at Jayrambati, Banaras and Calcutta. Every time she was to me the eternally affectionate Mother.

I remember well, in 1907, when two of my brother-disciples and myself received the sannyasin's robes and blessings from her, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna for us:

> 'O Lord, deign to protect these children in their sannyasa. On hills, mountains, forests, wherever they may be, grant them a few morsels of food.'

Wonderful! With unperturbed face she was pushing her children on the razor-sharp path of renunciation, but at the same time the affection of her mother-heart remained winkless as ever. This is why, even in his supreme moments of dispassion when everything else was renounced, when there constantly arose in the mind the refrain, 'I have no father, mother or birth,' the renouncing child could not deny one relationship, which he felt with his entire heart—for he felt he had one, the Mother who existed permeating all and all times, who lived in the world to help ferry her children across the world.

When we were taking leave the gracious Mother accompanied us up to the 'palmyra tank' in the boundary of the village. As we took the dust of her feet her eyes glistened. And at last tears rolled down her soft profound eyes. How can I forget that scene?

Sri Ramakrishna would be beside himself with joy in the company of his renouncing children. He would take them aside and talk intimately about the life of renunciation and would anxiously feed them with sweets. I noticed the same attitude in the Mother too. Once we went from Banaras to Jayrambati, two Sannyasins Swami Achalananda and myself. Some householder disciples too were there at that time. All of us dined together at night. When we were about to retire, long time after our meals the Mother sent for both of us. As we went in we found her standing there with two cups of milk in her hand for us. 'Take this my children' she said. As there was no sufficient milk it could not be served to all. 'They (meaning the householder disciples), my children, can take a lot of things at home,' she said, 'but who is there to feed you?'

Meanwhile, having to stay in South India for long years, I continued to be deprived of physical *darsan* of the Mother. But in the very core of my heart I always felt her blessings which volatilized all fear. When the Mother visited Bangalore during her South Indian pilgrimage early in 1911 I was blessed to have a few days' intimate contact with her again. Incidents of this time have been recorded in the book entitled, *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*.

* * * *

The Mother was the perfect image of tenderness, modesty, simplicity and purity. Highest spiritual knowledge and realization were like fruits in her palm. But above all she was the Mother. This is her supreme manifestation.

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SARADA DEVI AND HER DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

Swami Yatiswarananda

The Blessed Day

The year 1910 was indeed a very auspicious year for me because it was during this period that I had the privilege of touching the lotus feet of the Holy Mother for the first time in my life. A group of us, college students, used to visit the Mother's House, or the Udbodhan Office, at Baghbazar, Calcutta, on special sacred days. Lady devotees would meet the Mother separately, and we had to join hundreds of men devotees—young and old—who would come there to offer their salutations to her and receive her blessings. On such occasions, she would sit thickly veiled, with her feet resting on the floor. Her face would be entirely hidden from view. We had *darsan* only of her feet. And we worshipped with flowers those blessed feet—worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna himself—, touched them with our forehead and felt uplifted by her presence.

But one day, soon after, I was more fortunate. Some of us were preparing ourselves for joining the monastic life and used to spend our week-ends at the Belur Math—the Head Quarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. The great disciples of the Master used to treat us as their own and won our hearts by their unbounded selfless love. One Monday, as I was about to return to Calcutta, they asked me to take some vegetables of the Belur Math garden to the Mother at Baghbazar. I was delighted at this great opportunity and accompanied one of the senior monks who was also going there. After crossing the Ganga, we reached the Udbodhan Office, went upstairs and entered the shrine-room. The Holy Mother was there, alone and without her veil. She had just finished her daily worship and we could see her face radiating an inexpressible sublimity, compassion and bliss. It was indeed a divine face, entirely different from what one sees ordinarily in mortals. When the elderly monk introduced me to her as an aspirant for the monastic order, she was greatly pleased and blessed me, putting her hand on my head. I felt the power of her unfailing blessings and was greatly moved. Such was the deep impression made on my mind that, whenever I think of the Holy Mother, I feel that the blessed hand of hers is still on my head and I wish and pray that she may ever keep me and others under her motherly protection and guidance.

A Unique Manifestation of the Divine Mother

I am reminded of an incident. During the Holy Mother's stay at Banaras, a lady came to meet her. At this time the Mother had with her one of her constant lady attendants, Golap-Ma, who was physically a very impressive personality. Taking her to be the Holy Mother, the visitor went up to her and saluted her. Golap-Ma at once recognized the mistake and asked her to bow down to the Holy Mother. The Mother was in one of her light moods. Without contradicting Golap Ma, she told the lady that she would get everything by saluting Golap-Ma. The poor lady felt a little perplexed and didn't know what to do. At this, Golap-Ma lost her patience and addressing the lady said rather sharply: 'My child! Haven't you got the eye to see the divine face of the Mother?' At this, scales fell off as it were from the eyes of the lady. She recognized something of the glory of the

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Holy Mother, bowed down at her feet and felt greatly blessed.

During my stay in America, I went once to a department store in order to get a frame for a picture of the Holy Mother as we used to see her. The lady in charge of that section took the picture from my hand, looked at it intently and, being deeply impressed, asked me with an amount of tenderness: 'Is this your mother?' I replied 'Yes,' but I knew in my heart of hearts that she was much more than an earthly mother. She was to us the unique manifestation of the glory of the Divine Mother of the universe, born in this age to bless mankind.

There was a simple-hearted old lady living in the country-side where Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother were born. Witnessing something of the honour and glory which the rich and the poor alike were bestowing on the Holy Mother, she became a little reflective one day and remarked naively: 'Do you know there was a talk of my marriage with Sri Ramakrishna before he married Sarada? Had I been married to him I, too, would have become your Holy Mother and would have received all this worship and adoration!' The poor lady didn't know that the Holy Mother was great not just as the consort of Sri Ramakrishna but in her own right. As Sri Ramakrishna himself said:

> 'She is Sarada, Sarasvati; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest impure people should come to grief by looking at her with impure minds... She is the communicator of knowledge; she is full of the rarest wisdom.'

She, too, was conscious of her own divinity and divine mission. As she said in later years,

> 'This body is a divine body...Do not make any distinction between Sri Ramakrishna and me...Sri Ramakrishna has left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world.'

The Incomprehensible Greatness of the Mother

As we study this extraordinary life of the Holy Mother, we are astonished to find how with the passing of times, her divine glory and power, which she had at first kept hidden, are becoming more and more manifest and appreciated. During her earlier days even some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna could not realize her greatness. It was comprehended by Swami Vivekananda alone. Before undertaking his wanderings in Northern India he prayed to the Holy Mother that he might not return before attaining the highest realization. She blessed him profusely but asked him whether he would not like to take leave of his mother. To this the Swami replied: 'Mother, you are my only mother and none else!' And so he could point out to his brother disciples, saying:

> 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Sakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world...Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Sakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world.'

As we find later on, the Swami's words proved literally true and his brother disciples recognized the Holy Mother's unique greatness and composed hymns in adoration of her. In his Ramakrishna Sangha Stotra, Swami Saradananda salutes her saying:

> यथाग्नेर्दाहिकाशक्ती रामकृष्णे स्थिता हि या।
> सर्वविद्यास्वरूपां तां सारदां प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

To Her who resides as the Shakti of the Cosmic Power in Ramakrishna, ever

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as the burning power dwells in fire—to that Sarada, the embodiment of all knowledge, do I bow down.

Swami Abhedananda in his famous hymn to the Holy Mother addresses her saying:

देवीं प्रसन्नां प्रणतार्तिहन्त्रीं योगीन्द्रपूज्यां युगधर्मपात्रीम्।
तां सारदां भक्तिविज्ञानदात्रीं दयास्वरूपां प्रणमामि नित्यम्॥

O Sarada, Goddess propitious, Destroyer of misery in souls resigned,
Saviour of religion in every age,
By Yogindra worshipped, O Mother kind,
Givest Love and Wisdom Thou,
Grace Incarnate! To Thee I bow.

After we had come to know both the Holy Mother and some of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, we had the privilege of witnessing how even the mighty spiritual giants like Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda and Saradananda would feel like little children in her presence; and she—though not physically much older—would receive them, bless them and even caress them as a mother does her own children.

A Confluence of the Highest Ideals of Womanhood

One of the great difficulties in understanding and appreciating the life of the Holy Mother is that she combines in her own life the ancient ideals of Sita and Savitri, Maitreyi and Gargi—all at the same time. She comes in a line with the greatest of the holy women of the past, embodying and setting a most glorious ideal for women to follow in the future. In ancient India—as everywhere else in olden times—, the usual place and activities of woman were in the seclusion of her home. She tended the hearth-fire and performed the manifold duties of the household. But she also sang hymns in honour of the Deities and joined in religious ceremonies as man's partner in life. As the mother of the race, she contributed to domestic happiness by her loving care and compassionate service to those around her; but some times she was more than that. In the most ancient Hindu scripture, the Rig Veda, we find her also as the Rishi or seer of many a Vedic hymn. Thus Vak—one of the greatest of such Rishis—declares in the famous Devi Sukta:

> 'I am the Mistress of all, the dispenser of wealth, the first to be worshipped in every sacrifice. I know the Soul Supreme or Brahman, for there is no difference between Him and Me...The effulgent gods perform the different functions in the universe by means of my help. I am the power in man by which he breathes, sees, hears and takes his food...I am the energy in Brahman, the Mother of all.'

The ideal of Sita and Savitri are well-known. But the ideal represented by the Brahmavadinis Maitreyi and Gargi, as we find in the Upanishads and to which Swami Vivekananda referred, should become more widely known.

When the sage Yajnavalkya, on the eve of his retirement from the world, offered his earthly possessions to Maitreyi, she asked him:

> 'What shall I do with that by which I cannot become immortal? What you know of immortality, that please tell me.' It was then that the sage declared that the husband is loved not for the sake of the husband but for the sake of the Self, that the wife is loved not for the sake of the wife but for the sake of the Self.'

As we know, this ancient ideal was fully realized by Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother in this modern age of ours.

When Sri Ramakrishna asked the Holy Mother if she wanted to drag him into

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the world, she promptly replied: 'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of spiritual life.' She really wanted to do more. Sitting at the feet of her Master she wanted to undergo various forms of spiritual practice, realize the Supreme Spirit in Its different aspects and attain the highest illumination, immortality and peace. As we find later, she had to do still more—she had to bring light and peace to many weary souls turning to her for solace and guidance, and thus continue the Mission of the Master for more than three decades after his passing.

Gargi was esteemed not only for her spiritual knowledge but also for her powers of judgment. Among the wise ones assembled in the court of King Janaka, it was she who decided that Yajnavalkya was the best knower of Brahman, after challenging him with the most subtle questions about the ultimate Reality and receiving suitable answers.

Not only in matters spiritual but even in those administrative and organizational, the disciples of the Master used to approach the Holy Mother for advice. When confronted with momentous and delicate questions which even these great monks and seniors of the Order could not decide, or wavered in their decision, they would consult the Mother and she would invariably give them the most clear-cut and appropriate decisions which only a divinely illuminated and yet practical-minded soul like her could do.

As the Sangha Mata—or the HolyMother of the Order—she always admonished her monastic children to keep alive in their heart the ideal of renunciation and spirituality.

The Mighty Heart of the Compassionate Mother

When we had the privilege of seeing her she had grown into a mighty spiritual teacher who could transform the most morally degraded and evil-minded by her blessings. Among those who came to her for refuge were people of whom she said:

> 'Several among those who come here are up to anything in life. No type of sin has been left undone by them. But when they come here and address me as mother, I forget everything and they get more than they deserve.'

Once, when some one protested against her blessing a young man who had gone astray, she bluntly said:

> 'If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?'

To a woman who repented of the evil life she lived, the Mother said:

> 'Don't despair for whatever you have done. You will get over all your sinful tendencies.'

She also gave initiation to that woman and inspired her to live a spiritual life.

Here we get a glimpse of the mighty mother-heart, the divine grace, which makes the impure pure, the ignorant enlightened and the bound free.

Conscious of her cosmic, divine nature and power, she said: 'I am as much the mother of the good as of the bad.' With her deep spiritual introspection she saw the essential spiritual core of all and refused to see their superficial defects. One day when Golap-Ma was scolding a maid-servant, the Holy Mother asked her the reason for it and got a piqued reply: 'Mother, what is the good of telling you? You cannot see the defects of others.' To this the Mother replied mildly:

> 'Well Golap! There is no want of people to see the faults of others. The world will not come to a standstill if I am otherwise.'

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It is in this uplifting strain that the Mother spoke only a few days before her passing away to a devotee:

'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own!'

This was practically the last instruction left by the Holy Mother to us all-ignorant mortals. Let us remember that not by entertaining a spirit of fault-finding but by cultivating a divine love for our fellow beings that we can hope to find peace for ourselves and for the world.

प्रसीद मातर् विनयेन याचे नित्यं भव स्नेहवती सुतेषु ।
प्रेमैकबिन्दुं चिरदग्धचित्ते विषिञ्च चित्तं कुरु नः सुशान्तम् ॥

'Be loving and gracious to Thy children,
O Mother! We humbly beseech,
Sprinkle in our hearts arid,
A drop of love, to enjoy peace!'

SRI SARADA, THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER

T. M. P. Mahadevan

It is very difficult to speak or write about the significance of the Holy Mother, because it requires enormous spiritual evolution even to understand a fragment of her magnificence and glory. Hers was an intensive spiritual life which was united with that of the Great Master, and no one can comprehend it if he has not entered on the path of the glorious spirit. To speak about the Holy Mother is to speak about Sri Ramakrishna, for, between them there was no difference. Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'I and the Holy Mother are one.' The same sentiment was expressed by the Holy Mother to her disciples. There is a parallel in the Upanishads. Yajnavalkya and his younger wife Maitreyi were spiritually united. Her husband's wealth had no fascination for Maitreyi. All that she wanted to acquire was his wisdom. Acharya Suresvara, commenting on this particular episode in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, puts the following words in the mouth of sage Yajnavalkya:

अतिस्नेहापकृष्टोमा देहार्धं शूलिनः श्रिता ।
त्वं तु सर्वात्मनात्मानं कृत्स्नं मामाप्तुमिच्छसि ॥

'Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas, on account of intense love for her Lord, occupied half the portion of His body, but you, Maitreyi, want to become identical with me, with the entirety of your being.'

Parvati was able to acquire only half of Siva's body, but Maitreyi who was longing to have the wisdom of the non-dual spirit, became identical with the spirit of Yajnavalkya. The Holy Mother attained attunement with her Lord Sri Ramakrishna; and so there was no difference between them. It is difficult, therefore, to speak about the Mother who transcends all empirical usage, even as the final truth of the distinctionless Brahman defies the power of mind and speech at comprehension and expression. The spirit of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada is the supreme Atman, the non-dual reality. We can only attempt in our own frail and halting manner to get a glimpse of that magnificence. No mortal can exhaust the infinite reservoir of mercy and love which the Holy Mother was.

Born in the year 1853, married when she was but five, becoming united with her

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holy husband at eighteen, she was only thirty-three when Sri Ramakrishna passed away and lived thereafter for thirty-four years. She survived in the physical body even Swami Vivekananda by about seventeen years. There seems to be a grand plan even at the back of these life-spans. Sri Ramakrishna laid the foundations of the neo-Vedantic Mission in the hearts and minds of his young disciples. Swami Vivekananda was responsible for the expansion of this mission throughout the globe. But it was the Holy Mother that was the consolidator of this grand mission of the Master. When the young boys who had gathered round Sri Ramakrishna in the last years of his terrestrial life were disgusted with their existence on the passing away of the Master and wanted to go away in different directions and lose themselves in perpetual *tapasya* it was the Holy Mother that integrated them, brought them together and rallied them round Sri Ramakrishna's Mission; because Sri Ramakrishna had left these children in her charge and had told her that she had to do what he himself had left undone on account of his very short earthly life. It was the Holy Mother that was the rallying centre for these boys; it was her grace that made them succeed in taking the message of the Master to every corner of the globe. And so, if we today are the beneficiaries of the Ramakrishna Mission, we owe it to the great wisdom and the integral power of the Holy Mother. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the Holy Mother was an incarnation of Sarasvati. A village girl without education was described by the Master as the incarnation of the Goddess of Learning. In our country education does not mean necessarily book-learning. The Master himself had no use for the learning which he regarded as a bread-winning education. One need not be learned at all in our country and yet may be wise. We hav had several instances of sages who cou not read and write and yet who were th fountain-heads of wisdom. In the case Sri Ramakrishna we have a sage of th highest order, who could scarcely wri his own name in Bengali. So was S Sarada too. She made attempts to lear to read and write later on; but her mi did not turn in that direction. Yet th words that flowed from her lips we listened to by the most learned who cam in contact with her with veneratio and deep love. Though Sri Sarada De did not have formal education, she had th unique privilege of being educated in th real sense of the term, by her Master a Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna nev neglected to perform his duty by S Sarada. In spite of the fact that h was lost in Samadhi most of the time, h instructed the Holy Mother even i minor details of household life, detai as to how one should serve a guest, et So under the immediate care of this gre incarnation of India's spirituality, S Sarada imbibed the truest wisdom. Mo of the years that she spent in Dakshine war she lived in seclusion because of h natural shyness and modesty. Even th Master she used to see only at momen when nobody else was there. Many da would pass sometimes without her gettin an opportunity to go before him, b yet all the while her thoughts we centred on the Master. Her inner l ing united with the spirit of her Lor and naturally the wisdom that w Sri Ramakrishna's was bestowed up her. It was because of this wisdom whi Sri Sarada inherited, it was because s was an incarnation of Sarasvati that s was able to accomplish this great missi which was left to her as a legacy by S Ramakrishna.

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I can think of only one other parallel in the religious history of India. Mandana Misra's wife, Sarada, according to tradition, was chosen to arbitrate in that great argument between Mandana Misra and Sri Sankara. When Mandana Misra was worsted in that argument, she followed her husband in joining the monastic order and became the first lady disciple of Sri Sankara. Tradition has it that it was she that became the foundation of the Sarada Pitham, and it was she that was responsible for the consolidation of Advaita and the various institutions established for the purpose in the different parts of our country. Even so, the Holy Mother was a veritable incarnation of Sarasvati, full of wisdom and full of infinite kindness. The Master had trained her for the great role she was going to play. In her younger years she was rather critical of others' faults. Naturally, being pure and spotless, even the least fault in others would stand out before her vision and she was critical of them. But the Master knew that Sri Sarada was to be the Mother of the Universe before whose kindness there would be no distinction between the sinner and the virtuous. If the Mother's grace will transform only the spiritually evolved, of what value is that? It is towards the sinner that love and grace should flow in greater measure. And so very soon the Mother got out of this habit of being critical of others. With infinite patience she used to bear the insults hurled at her by one of her own sisters-in-law and the more difficult daughter of that sister-in-law. By divine dispensation, the Mother's affection was fixed on this young daughter of her brother because she had to live in this world tenanting her body. Even household duties she never used to shirk, whether in her parental home or in the home built in Calcutta for her by Swami Saradananda. She used to scrub the floor, clean the vessels, cook the food and serve the guests and relations. She showed by her behaviour how an ideal mother should conduct her life in a household. Therefore it was that Sister Nivedita said that Sri Ramakrishna's last word on the ideal of Indian womanhood was the Holy Mother. The Mother's kindness and love flowed towards all. She initiated into spirituality all and sundry. People who had no chance at all in this life of any spiritual evolution, when they went to her and requested her for initiation, found her only too willing. It mattered very little whether external ceremonials were observed or not, whether there was the requisite outer purity or not, and whether the seeker was fit or not. The fact that the person had come to the Mother for spiritual instruction was enough. When someone remarked to her 'Why is it that while all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are such gems, great men who have renounced the world and dedicated themselves for the eternal cause of Vedanta, why is it that while these few disciples of the Master are exemplars of the perfect life, your disciples though so numerous should be so mediocre?', The Mother replied, 'Why do you compare what I am doing with the Master's Mission? The Master came to save these few souls in order that millions might be saved through them. But what about the unfortunate children who have had no chance of gaining admittance into the presence of the Master. It is for bringing succour to them that the Master has left me behind.' And so, infinite was the love of this Mother. A mother makes no discrimination between her intelligent children and the dull ones. If anything, the mother is more kind to her unfortunate children. So was the Holy Mother. Every-

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one had access to her. No one was so mean as not to be in a position to gain her favour. Once in her village-home she served food to a Muslim workman with her own hands. Though born in an orthodox family in a village that was small, she had no use for rules that would restrict motherhood. No matter who the sufferer was, her heart would go out spontaneously to the victim of suffering. One day when she was at the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta she heard the wailing of a lady and went out to the verandah to see what was happening. The husband of that woman was beating her. The Mother could not contain herself and cried out to that man saying, 'Why are you behaving in such a brutal fashion? Don't kill her.' Immediately that man stopped beating his wife. The Mother's love knew no bounds at all. Her love flowed not only towards human beings but also towards animals. In her village-home one morning a cow was separated from her calf and the calf was bleating in order to gain the freedom to go to its mother. The Holy Mother could not bear to see this agony. She untied the calf so that it could go to its mother, and get what it needed. On another occasion when someone was fondling a cat with one foot placed on the head of the cat, the Mother said, 'The head is the seat of Guru. One should not touch the head with the foot. Salute the cat.' Not only towards animals but even towards inanimate objects the Mother was gentle. Once, the Brahmin cook of her household after having swept the floor threw the broom-stick in a corner. The Mother took her to task and said, 'Why do you behave so rudely towards the broom-stick? Can't you put it gently there?' Thus, limitless was the Mother's love. Her Motherliness was all-comprehensive. In fact, she was to teach, according to Sri Ramakrishna's plan, the Motherhood of God to humanity.

Hinduism has several unique features that are not to be found elsewhere and one of them is that God is not only father but also mother. In the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* there is an exquisite passage which is addressed to the Ultimate Divinity thus:

त्वं स्त्री त्वं पुमानसि
त्वं कुमार उत वा कुमारी।
त्वं जीर्णो दण्डेन वञ्चसि
त्वं जातो भवसि सर्वतोमुखः॥

Thou art woman; Thou art man; Thou art the youth and also the maiden; Thou as an old man totterest with a stick; being born, Thou becomest facing all directions.

And so in Hinduism, God can be addressed as Mother as well as Father. In the *Bhagavad Gita* the Lord declares:

पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः।

I am the Father of this world, the Mother, the Protector, the Creator.

There is a familiar prayer which says:

त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव
त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव।
त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव
त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव॥

Thou alone art my mother; Thou alone my father; Thou alone art my relation; Thou alone my friend; Thou alone art my learning; Thou alone my wealth; Thou alone art my everything, O God of Gods!

God has no sex even as saintliness knows no sex. If it is right to appeal to God as our Heavenly Father, it is just and proper that we should regard him as our Universal Mother. It is only a convention that speaks of God in the masculine gender. It is only in the relative world that there are distinctions of sex. In the transcendent there can be no distinction at all. It is true that man, so long as he remains only a man, cannot

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outgrow the attitude of looking at God after the fashion of a human being. Yet he has to transcend the limitations of finitude as far as he can; and one of the ways of transcending those limitations is not to regard God exclusively as male but also as female, not only as father but also as mother. The Holy Mother represents the Motherhood of God and the essence of Motherhood is love, love that is pure and serene. The Holy Mother was nothing, if she was not serene and pure love. Her mind was the cosmic mind, her heart was the universal heart. She came to teach that if the world continues to exist in spite of strife, in spite of violence and war, it is because of the spirit of Motherliness which is yet alive. But for this spirit of Motherliness, humanity would have disappeared altogether from the face of the earth. This Motherliness or the motherly feeling is not to be identified with any particular physiological constitution. In fact, there is the mingling of the male and the female in every individual. It is only for the sake of convention that we call certain persons males and certain others females. Spiritually, mentally, there is a mixture of the man and the woman in every individual. There are certain qualities which are of an aggressive type. There are certain other qualities which are mild and meek. There can be no individual without a mixture of both types of qualities. The meek and the mild attributes are those of the woman. The valiant and the heroic attributes are those of the man. These are to be found mingled in various proportions in every individual. It is only when the woman becomes the mother, that the ideal qualities of womanhood manifest in her. Sri Ramakrishna was full of motherly qualities. Read the chapter in his Life which deals with his attitude towards the young boys who gathered round him during his last years, you will realize how he protected them with infinite care even as the mother-eagle would her fledglings. It was to teach that the universe cannot remain even for a moment but for its foundation in motherliness that the Holy Mother took form and shape and lived in the world. And it was upon the bedrock of her motherliness that the Ramakrishna Mission was built.

Swami Vivekananda conceived of a plan for this Order. It was a plan for India as a whole. He went to America not with a view to converting the Americans into Hindus or to gain a name for himself in the world. He went to America with a view to putting India in her rightful place on the map of the world. That too he wanted to do not for the sake of India, but for the sake of the future of humanity. Swamiji was convinced that if India was not raised from her distressed condition the world could never progress. For, he knew that India's destiny was to lead the world. In his travels throughout this country after the passing of his Master, mostly as an itinerant monk, he came into close contact with the realities as they existed then. He saw everywhere hunger and poverty and disease and insanitation. His heart bled for the teeming millions of our country. He lost all sleep and rest. His soul was burning with a passion to serve his brethren, but he saw no light as to how to do it. How was he, an unknown wandering monk, to lead this nation to strength and glory? When he heard in Madras that there was going to be a Parliament of Religions in Chicago and when friends pressed him to represent Hinduism there, he thought that this was an opportunity; but he did not want to go unless the call came. He wrote to the Mother of the Mission for permission and also meditated

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on his Master. He saw a vision of Sri Ramakrishna appearing on the waves of the Madras sea beckoning him to go westward. He received the permission of the Mother with her blessings. Thus fortified he went to America. He was unknown there. But by the will of Providence he gained admission into the Parliament of Religions. His exposition of Hinduism descended upon the American people as a cloud-burst, shook them to the very foundations, and made them realize that India was not an uncivilized country. The Americans wondered as to why to this very respectable land, missionaries should be sent on a civilizing mission. Swami Vivekananda thought that through Vedanta he could introduce to the West the best that was in India. Swamiji did this not with a view to converting the Americans. I think that it is not even proper to say that he regarded the Americans as a people who had acquired the eligibility for receiving Vedanta. But he wanted to bring to their minds the highest lesson that India has to teach the world—a philosophy which is not narrow, which is not provincial, which is not confined within any limitation, a philosophy which is as universal as man. Though it had its origin in India, Vedanta is meant for the entire humanity. No matter in what religion one may be born, one may imbibe it. Vedanta is the common property of every human being. This was the message that Swamiji wanted to give to the west. To India his gospel was that of social service. He realized that what we in this country needed was a national renaissance, a collective progress. We were each living a narrow individualistic life. We had no sense of common solidarity. We wanted to attain our own individual salvation and did not bother even a little as to what happened to our neighbour. Inhuman practices had crept into our body politic and they were masquerading under the name of religion. Especially when Swamiji came to Malabar he was horror-struck to find there various grades of untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability. For a thousand years India had groaned under the heel of foreign rulers, and Swamiji could not bear to see this sight. So, he taught Karmayoga as the method for India, because through common-weal India would rise. Political subjection, economic depression, illiteracy, ill-health—these ought to be removed and the common man should be raised to a level of decency. What is the use of preaching religion to those who go about with empty stomachs? Religion will be a mockery if you go to the poor and the stricken and preach to them about the glories of heaven and the compensation that may come after death. So, Swamiji in his 'plan of campaign', wanted the Mission to serve the masses, raise their level, feed and clothe them and nurse them. That was the main task that he left for his followers in India, because unless we are strong, unless we are great, unless we ourselves realize the greatness of our heritage, we cannot lead the world. These then are the two sides of his mission.

The Holy Mother was the inspiration of Swamiji's work. She blessed every undertaking of his. She blessed the Ramakrishna Order. It was the Holy Mother that became the corner-stone of this great edifice which we have before us in the form of the Ramakrishna Mission. So, on the occasion of the Centenary of the Holy Mother's birth, let us pay our homage to her and adore her as the Universal Mother. Let us invoke her grace so that India may become great again and lead the world to its spiritual destiny.

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THE HOLY MOTHER—THE IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

Swami Vireswarananda

The life of Sri Saradamani Devi or the Holy Mother, as she is now known all over India and even abroad, is bereft of all those things which today we are apt to consider great according to our present-day objective standards. Judged by these current standards, she looked like a common pious lady going round her daily routine household duties. Hers was a life of extreme simplicity devoid of all events and activities which attract one's attention. Engrossed in feverish action we are apt to overlook the real significance of a simple and unostentatious life. Friends of her childhood, whom many have seen, used to say, 'We have lived with her from her very childhood, we have played and mixed intimately with her, but we have never experienced anything supernatural about her. Today we are surprised to see so many devotees coming to her, a temple built, in which she is installed as a deity, and what not. Who knows what all this means!' Again some have remarked 'She whom we went to see was found sitting like a bashful daughter-in-law in a family, with a long-drawn veil. We could not find anything of divinity about her,' and so on. Swami Saradananda, who had the good fortune to serve her after the passing away of Swami Yogananda, once remarked, 'We could get some inkling at least of the greatness of the Master, but of this lady we cannot understand anything. She has drawn the veil of Maya so thick around her that no one can see through it and have a glimpse of her greatness.' One is reminded of a great Saint's song, 'O Mother, nobody knows who and what you are; people describe you variously,' and it is but natural, for, as he says again, 'If, O Mother, you do not reveal yourself, who can know you?' Once Swami Premananda wrote to one thus, 'Who knows Mother? Who can know her? You have heard of great women like Sita, Savitri and Sri Radha; but Mother has surpassed all of them. There is not the least display of divine power (Aiswarya) in her. In the Master, at least the glory of knowledge (Vidya) was manifest, and he used to go frequently into Samadhi. But in Mother even this greatness is not manifest. What a tremendous personality to keep all her powers in such control! Don't you see how hundreds and thousands of people are flocking to her. She possesses infinite power (Sakti) and benignity. Have you not noticed how the Empress of the universe is playing the part of a beggar woman at Jayrambati—cleaning the house, washing utensils, winnowing rice and even removing the plates of her devotees after they have taken their food. The Master's cancer helped to unite the devotees into an Organization, and Mother is undergoing these hardships at Jayrambati in order to set an ideal for the householders. What great patience, what compassion and, above all, what great humility!'

When the Mother was at Madras on her way to Rameswaram and other places of pilgrimage in the South, the devotees and friends of the Math at Madras used to come and inquire of Swami Ramakrishnananda whether she was going to lecture. That was the yardstick by which they measured greatness—intellectualism. They had heard Mrs. Besant, who could throw the audience to raptures by her oratory. So they expected the Mother also to lecture, but they returned sorely disappointed when the Swami replied in

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the negative. What a pity they missed a great opportunity! If only they had cared to sit at her feet for a few moments, they would have immensely profited by it. We read in the Scriptures that when a person comes to normal after attaining Samadhi, or the super-conscious state, though the world of duality appears to him again, it loses all attraction for him, for he has realized its unsubstantiality. One got an inkling of this experience, as it were, after spending a few moments in the presence of the Mother. Ah, what a blissful experience to sit at the feet of one who was an embodiment of humility, kindness and love, whose very look revealed a heart lacerated at the suffering of mankind, whose love knew no difference between a saint and a sinner, and who shed a holy radiance that could not be fathomed, but in which one was content to bask! Those who breathed in this spiritual atmosphere found, when they came out that their deep-seated malady—the attraction for the world of the senses and sense-enjoyment—was cured to a great extent. It tasted insipid. Life was no longer an aimless wandering but seemed to have a purpose and value. The soul that was slumbering was awakened and heard the sweet though yet the distant call of the Infinite and became restless to attain It. What a metamorphosis!

Saradamani Devi was married to Sri Ramakrishna when she was only five years old. The marriage took place when the Master was brought to Kamarpukur from Dakshineswar by his relatives who mistook his God-intoxicated state and the consequent strange behaviour as madness. After his marriage, the Master returned to Dakshineswar and resumed his intense spiritual practices which lasted for twelve years. During this period he had visited Kamarpukur twice, and during these two short visits little Sarada also came fr Jayrambati, her parental home. It w not, however, till she came to stay at t Dakshineswar temple garden that t enactment of the great drama before t world began.

Sarada in her distant village-home h come to know of the Master's ill-heal and she had longed to be by his side a serve him. Her father, coming to unde stand her inner feelings, took her Dakshineswar. They had to cover all t distance, about sixty miles, walking. the way Sarada fell ill, for she was n accustomed to this kind of hardship, a when she reached Dakshineswar she w still ailing. It was about 9 p.m. All oth members of her party went to see t Master's mother, who was staying in t music tower, but Sarada went straight the Master's room. What a welcome t distressed wife got from her husband, ascetic of ascetics! 'Oh, you come no Would that my Mathur were alive to ta care of you.' After seeing the Mast Sarada wanted to go to her mother-i law in the music tower, but the Mas said, 'No, no, stay here. It would be rat difficult for the doctor to treat you ther So Sarada stayed in his room with anoth lady. Next day a doctor was sent f and within a few days she felt all rig and went to live with her mother-in-l This warm welcome from the Master a his care and solicitude for her dispell from her mind all doubts and misgivin and she decided to stay at Dakshines and serve the Master and his mother.

Slowly the great drama began to u fold itself. Tota Puri had once remark 'A wife presents no danger to one wh really established in Brahman, for, a t seer of Brahman sees no difference betw man and woman, being established in perception of unity, the Self.' The Mas

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wanted to test himself, and so he allowed his wife to be by his side and serve him to her heart's content. He even permitted her for some time to sleep with him. Yet never did his mind swerve from the path of purity. One day Mother asked him, 'How do you look upon me?' The Master replied, 'I look upon you as the embodiment of the Divine Mother.' To this unique feature of their conjugal life she also made her contribution. It was possible because she too was the Master's equal in purity. The Master had asked her in the early days of her association with him at Dakshineswar, 'Do you want to drag me down into Maya?' 'Why should I do that?' came the prompt reply, 'I have come only to help you in your religious quest.' Did she not pray to the Lord, 'Even the moon has dark spots; make me pure as those spotless tube-roses.' The Master realized her absolute purity and recognised her contribution to his religious life. He later said to his disciples, 'Had she not been so pure, who knows whether I might not have lost my self-control.' Truly did one of the disciples sing, 'Whose character and whose life were pure, who was purity incarnate—to Her our salutations!' This unimaginably pure conjugal life culminated in the Master's putting the Holy Mother on the pedestal of the deity and worshipping her as the great Mother of the Universe with all the prescribed rituals. This marked the triumph of the spirit over the body, the resurgence of the divine in him and the invoking of the presence of the Divine Mother in his wife.

The life of the Holy Mother was one of continuous service to the Master, with all her heart and without caring for her personal inconveniences. It was the be-all and end-all of her life. It was not prompted by any sense of duty, but was the outcome of her love and reverence for him. It did not end merely with external service, for she grasped the central principle of his life and made it a part and parcel of her life. Her thoughts and aspirations were all imbued with his ideal and she became a true helpmate in fulfilling his life's mission. Truly did one of the disciples of the Master say of her, 'Whose soul is dedicated to the Master, who is fond of hearing His name, and who is the embodiment, as it were, of his thoughts—I salute thee again and again.' Even after the Master had passed away, her life was one continuous offering at his altar. She was always absorbed in his adoration and in the carrying out of his life's mission, for the fulfilment of which she was left behind.

Tenderness is the basis of man's relationship with his wife and Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with his wife was ideal in this respect. He was always careful to see that he did not wound her feelings and showed the greatest consideration for her wishes. His attitude towards her was one of deep respect, so much so that in later life when she was treated disrespectfully by one of her relatives, she remarked, 'I was married to a husband who never spoke harshly to me and never hurt my feelings. He did not strike me even with a flower.' He would always and in everything try to make her feel how close she was to his heart. He had even some gold ornaments made for her. He took particular care to see that no one insulted her, for he knew that it would harm the offender if she was really incensed. He used to say, 'You may be saved if the being in this body (i.e. in him) takes offence, but if the being in her is angry, no one will be able to save you.'

Mother used to distribute liberally sweets and vegetables brought by devotees for the Master, after keeping what

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was necessary for him. Once he remarked, 'How can you make both ends meet if you spend in this manner?' She felt hurt at these words, which questioned the large-heartedness of a mother, and left his presence sullenly. The Master understood the situation and said to his nephew Ramlal, 'Go and pacify your aunt. If she is angry, I shall be undone.' This mutual respect was a prominent feature of their marital life.

Mother's greatness became all the more manifest in the domestic setting in which she found herself after the passing of the Master. She used to live for the most part in her parental home at Jayrambati, and being the eldest child of the family, the responsibility of bringing up her younger brothers and taking care of her aged mother fell on her. Some of these brothers were extremely worldly people, and proved a source of annoyance to her all her life. Added to this was the great trouble she had to undergo for the sake of a fatherless niece of hers and her crazy mother. But Mother bore it all and looked after their worldly welfare. Even ordinary mothers, who are so loving towards their children, expect a return from them in the distant future. But the love of the Holy Mother for her relations, who could not return anything, nay, who were often ungrateful to her, was something unique. It brought out in bold relief her spiritual greatness and her benign motherhood.

The same maternal love was evident in her spiritual ministry also. This love did not allow her to refuse spiritual succour to anyone, even to the worst type of sinner. It was given irrespective of the worth of the receiver, for the only motive behind was her maternal love. She would remark, 'Who else will bear the responsibilities of the sinner and the afflicted?' Being the mother of all, she gave freely to all without expecting anything in return.

We have briefly depicted the conjugal life of these two great souls. Has it any message for the modern world? It has, but to realize its true significance, we have first to grasp the noble traditions of India.

A great change is coming all over the world in the outlook of women. Women in the West have tried to refute the ancient view that the sexes are differently equipped, and therefore have different functions to perform in the social and national life. They have competed with men in all spheres of life and that to a great extent successfully, though it is questionable whether this has really made them happier. Indian women too are changing their outlook and are not satisfied with life purely in the domestic sphere—the home, which has been their main preoccupation for centuries, though there have been some notable exceptions to this. They claim freedom to live a fuller life. There is much justification for this revolt of women. Their position in our society is not all that is desirable, and it goes without saying that their participation in various fields of the national life should be welcomed. But in the excitement of this new adventure, our women should not lose what is best in them. It is to emphasize this, our ancient heritage, that the great drama was enacted at Dakshineswar.

The essence of Indian culture is the recognition of the unity of life and the acceptance of the fact that the realization of this unity is the highest good as also *true self-expression*. The acceptance of this truth and the means to realize it have been the basis of all our social institutions. India grasped the purpose

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of life long ago and organized society with a view to the attainment of that goal. In this organization she did not fail to take note of the fact that men and women were in various stages of spiritual progress, and as such the enforcing of the highest ideal on one and all would create confusion in society. So she built society on a graded scale to provide scope for some amount of enjoyment to spiritually immature souls, but at the same time she took care that they did not lose sight of the goal. Life was so regulated that all could proceed to that final goal through various experiences and stages of life.

Married life is a stage in the growth of the soul towards perfection. One has to go through this experience in order to go beyond it. Marriage is a symbol of the union of souls, and not a mere physical union. That is what makes the marriage tie so sacred. Physical love is only the outer court of the temple, not even the inner court, much less the sanctum sanctorum, but when properly regulated, it leads people right in front of the Deity. This is true of the vast majority of people, but there are pure souls for whom from the very first marriage is a union of souls, and to whom any other union is inconceivable as we find in the case of the Master and Sri Sarada Devi.

As human beings evolve spiritually, their conception of love also develops. Love is a force within man which expresses itself on the physical plane as the urge to procreate, but when regulated by higher ideals, it leads one to spiritual illumination. Marriage is fulfilled in discipline and service, and not in pleasure. It looks to the enrichment of life, and not to pleasure. It builds character and gives rise to higher interests, when enjoyment has ceased to be the aim. Hindu marriage gives prominence to these higher interests and refuses to accept the romantic view of marriage. Happiness comes from the fulfilment of these higher interests and the performance of prescribed duties, and not from leading a temporal life. The couple are spiritual partners, each of whom supplements the other, and both proceed towards the ultimate goal. Just as the woman is asked to be a perfect wife, so also man is asked to be a perfect husband. The pattern is fixed beforehand, and the couple are expected to attune themselves to it. To be like Sita or Rama is the ideal of a married life, and in this the demerits of the partners do not count seriously, for the failure of the one will not justify the other's not attaining this ideal. The wife seeks to realize the Divine in the husband, and her daily services to him is tantamount to worship. Before this vision of hers, his shortcomings disappear. This right of worship is what she claims, and not equality. Wifehood is great in proportion to what it gives. The ideal is not expecting simply to be loved, nor even to love and to be loved, but only to love without expectation of return. So the Hindu wife ever dreams of Sita and Savitri, who always gave and never claimed anything in return. This ideal of wifehood is not slavery imposed on women by society, as some are apt to think in these days, but it is a means to sublimate the physical instincts, to spiritualize the emotions. The greatness of Hinduism lies in the fact that it takes men and women from where they are and helps them in their forward march by asking them to change their angle of vision about things secular. It thus wipes out the difference between sacred and secular, and makes everything sacred. We are conscious of the fact that there are extreme cases that do not justify such

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an ideal, but in this relative world nothing is perfect, and when we set up a social ideal, we have to judge it by its capacity to produce 'the greatest good of the greatest number' and if it is so, then such a principle cannot be relegated to the dustbin simply because it does not apply to a very few abnormal cases, at least not till we have found a better one to replace it, for, life without ideals would only take us back to the stage of cave men. Swami Vivekananda says,

> 'The ideas behind our marriage system are the only ideas through which there can be a real civilization. There cannot be anything else...If individual pleasure were to be allowed to run loose in society the result must be evil, evil children, wicked and demoniacal...We have lost all these ideals, made almost a caricature of some of these great ideals...However faulty the working out may be, the principle is sound and if its application has become defective, work it out better. Why kill the principle?'

According to the Scriptures motherhood sanctifies woman. It is the consummation of her life. Why? For, when a woman becomes a mother, her feelings and emotions get more purified than in wifehood. She gradually becomes free from all taints of body-consciousness, and so takes a long stride in the march of the soul towards its ultimate goal. That is why motherhood is sacred. In social relations between men and women, the Hindu code prescribes the filial attitude which is so pure, in order to prevent an emotional crisis. It requires every woman to unfold herself as a mother, and not as just a woman.

Though the majority of men and women naturally prefer marriage and parenthood, yet there are exceptions among them who have felt the call of religion and want to take to the path of renunciation. They dare to walk alone without a helpmate in their journey towards the Infinite. There is no need for such women to go through the experience of wifehood or motherhood. The ultimate goal is the realization of the Self, pure and sexless; and this can be attained only through complete renunciation and absolute celibacy. What binds us is 'lust and greed'; and if one wants to be free, one must completely eradicate these two.

> 'You see, by leading a householder's life one needlessly dissipates one's mental powers. The loss one thus incurs can be made up if one takes to the monastic life...The obstacles to spiritual life are "lust and greed". Attachment to these diverts one from the way leading to God.' (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*)

Society has no claim on such souls, and they are free from the duty of motherhood. Short of this spirit of renunciation, Hinduism does not countenance the release from the responsibilities of parenthood in the name of freedom, for it justifies no cult of the so-called self-expression of today which equates licence with freedom. Those who are physically, mentally and morally well off have to fulfil their duty to society, or, as it is put by the Hindus, pay the ancestral debt, and not escape from the responsibilities of parenthood. It is only when love transcends all limitations and becomes universal that a woman is free from the duty of motherhood, so that she can bestow her motherly love on all who are in need of it, as we find in the life of Sri Sarada Devi. Swami Vivekananda says,

> 'In my opinion a race must first cultivate a great respect for motherhood through the sanctification and inviolability of marriage, before it can attain to the ideal of perfect chastity. The

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Roman Catholics and the Hindus, holding marriage sacred and inviolate have produced great chaste men and women of immense power. So until there is developed a great and sacred ideal about marriage apart from mutual attraction and love, I do not see how there can be great monks and nuns. As you have come to see that the glory of life is chastity, so my eyes also have opened to the necessity of this great sanctification for the vast majority, in order that a few lifelong chaste persons may be produced.'

The Holy Mother's life holds up an ideal for everyone—for the wife, the mother and the nun—for what was she but a nun, having the essentials of that life to perfection, viz., purity and spirit of renunciation? As Sister Nivedita puts it, 'She is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.' One can as well say, 'final word as to the ideal of womanhood,' for she is of a universal type, and not particularly Indian. Such great souls are sure to blossom in all races and climates where social conditions are favourable for her to remain essentially feminine. Everyone has to evolve towards the goal according to his or her Svadharma (one's own inner law) for as the Gita says: 'The Dharma of another, however well performed, is fraught with danger.' The aim of woman, therefore, must be to be a perfect woman, and not an imperfect man, for she cannot be something other than her true self. So her attempt to compete with men, which shows her lack of self-confidence, is harmful to her and to the world, for she is the life-energy of every nation, which cannot be wasted by directing it to wrong channels. Hinduism accepts the doctrine of Siva-Sakti—that the ultimate Reality has two aspects, the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine. As Sri Ramakrishna, quoting the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, puts it, 'O Rama, Thou alone art all that we see as male, and Sita, all that we see as female.' These two aspects of the Divine are not identical, but complementary, the two together making a perfect whole. So neither man nor woman is superior, but they are equals, though equipped differently. What men would like to see in women, is the manifestation of this Divine Feminine. That way only will women be able to win the respect of men, and not through a bid for equality, for it is a psychological fact that we admire in others qualities which we covet but do not possess. Unless this ideal of the Divine Feminine—Sakti—is reinstated, there is no hope for humanity. Swami Vivekananda wrote to one of his brother disciples,

'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life,—none of you. But gradually you will. Without Sakti there is no regeneration for the world...Mother is born to revive that wonderful Sakti in India.'

In spite of their ignorance, Indian women still preserve a great tradition which the world sorely needs today. Mother by her life has revitalized this great tradition. Our mothers and sisters should pause and meditate on this great ideal before they run for reforms after Western models, which have created chaos in the modern Western world. Mother has shown the way, and it is for them to follow in her footsteps, 'for their own salvation and for the good of the world'.

'If you do a good action, that will counteract your past evil action. Past sins can be counteracted by meditation, Japa and spiritual thought.

HOLY MOTHER

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SARADA DEVI: THE TRIUMPH OF WOMANHOOD

C. T. K. Chari

'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you' so wrote Swami Vivekananda in one of his letters. Now that we are celebrating the Birth Centenary of Holy Mother, we may be tempted to think that Swamiji's words no longer carry anything like the emphasis they carried in the early days of Ramakrishna Vedanta when Sarada Devi was not so universally acclaimed as Sri Ramakrishna. It is well to remind ourselves that a desire to possess the ashes of the Great Ones by no means proves that we have begun to understand or appreciate their true stature. Many of us would fain interpret the life and ideals of Sarada Devi from the supposedly unique standpoint of Hindu religion. It is worthwhile to point out that what is unique about the mystics, at any rate the greatest mystics like Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, is their belonging to the *World's Faith*; indeed they supply the only worthwhile argument for the conclusion that such a Faith exists, or can exist, apart from the 'two and seventy jarring sects'. The very form of their faith can easily deceive us concerning the universality of its content. Lucie-Christine (1844—1908) whose remarkable *Spiritual Journal* was published after her death in the second decade of this century, must have appeared to her contemporaries only as a fervent Christian of the French Catholic type, with a partiality for the Eucharist. No discerning reader of her *Journal*, however, can doubt that, in the depth and range of her mystical experiences, she approached Angela of Foligno, (13th Century), Julian of Norwich (14th-15th Centuries, and St. Teresa (1515-1582). To her contemporaries, Sarada Devi's life of wifely devotion and prayer was stamped with all that was local and peculiar to the Hindu tradition, yet, few who have attempted a study, however perfunctory, of the great women mystics will question the truth of Gauri-Ma's words:

> People have not yet been able to know the Holy Mother. A full appreciation of the significance of her life is bound to have a liberalizing influence upon the whole world.

Sarada Devi belongs to a Universal Faith for which most of us are still groping. I should like to single out three features of her life on which alone the claim can be staked. It has been pointed out that her life was comparatively uneventful. Here we should remember that the supreme desire of the great mystic is just to 'appear ordinary'. As R. H. Thouless remarked with profound insight in his *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion* if we are to talk of 'sublimation' at all we should have to say that

> in mystical conversion it is not only that part of the libido specialized in the sexual instinct that is sublimated, but the whole of the libido employed in the activities and affections of this world life.

Nothing less will do. Sarada Devi's whole life refutes the allegation that ecstasy incapacitates us from performing our daily duties. The duties are performed by the great mystic; but in a radically altered frame of mind which may escape detection by all save the most observant. Madame Acarie (1566—1618), a married woman with six children, who with unswerving constancy attended to her domestic

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routine, who never wrote a line or actively sought to bring others under her influence, was one of the greatest creative personalities of her time; she became the 'Conscience of Paris.' Her daughter, Marguerite, herself a notable mystic, once reproved a nun who tried to assume what she regarded as an appropriately grave exterior:

> There is no sin in being thought silly, but there may easily be sin in trying to look so correct. Do let yourself be natural!

Lucie-Christine could enter into all the games and amusements of her children; she wrote plays for them and staged them. The Holy Mother was unremitting in her care of her 'children': the men and women who were not of her flesh and blood at all. Perhaps, like other great women mystics, she often wrestled with, and vanquished, her desire for complete solitude, her distaste for trivial details and for the frequent interruptions of her devotional life. She is known to have praised Swami Vivekananda for founding an Order of Monks in which there is so much preoccupation with daily routine and social obligations. Her intuition (like Swamiji's) belongs to the highest order of mysticism. Of Jeanne-Francois de Chantal (1572—1641), Foundress of the Visitation, it was said:

> Our blessed Mother never excused herself save for illness, from being cook in her turn.

Marie Guyard or Madame Martine (1599–1672), later known as Marie de I' Incarnation and 'the Teresa of France' testified:

> On can read, write, do what one will, and nevertheless this fundamental occupation always abides, and the soul never ceases to be united to God. Even the immensities of God in no way divert her; but without stopping at them, she remains attached to God in her simplicity...

There is a second feature of the Holy Mother's life which lifts us above the barriers of caste and temple. Her love for others was no diffuse 'altruism' which tires of its zeal before it has run half its course; it always assumed the form of flaming loyalties to *persons*. Once, on seeing Swami Apurvananda, pale and exhausted after a journey, she expressed her intense concern:

> Ah! How pale! What a sunken look! I am sure you had no food on the way. Make haste, my child.

Swami Gambhirananda and others have recounted the touching story of her affection for one of the Muslim 'mulberry-robbers', Amzed. When her niece, Nalini, unable to overcome her caste prejudice, tossed food on to Amzed's leaf, the Holy Mother served the food herself and afterwards cleaned the place with the rebuke: 'Amzed is as truly my son as Sarat (Swami Saradananda) himself.' Here, again, comparisons will not be irreverent. The married Josephine Butler, whose passion for liberty and hatred of injustice made her launch a movement of sympathy for the victims of oppression and lust, befriended many girls who had been wronged before they had enough experience of the world to protect themselves. She received several into her own house. One of the first of these, a girl named Marion, as she lay dying, after months of harrowing illness, spoke out of the depths of her heart;

> 'When your soul quails at the sight of evil, dear Mrs. Butler, think of me and take courage. God has given me to you that you may never despair of any.

Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), the Quaker Saint and heroic prison-reformer, who found in Silence the Power which loves the unlovely into lovableness, could arouse

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strong personal loyalties not only in the convicts she sought to reform, but in almost all who came within her sphere of influence. Personal attachment sometimes silenced the medical scruples of the great Sister Dora. She nursed the mutilated arm of a man back to health after doctors had declared that it was a hopeless case necessitating amputation. So touching was the devotion of the man to Dora after recovery that he came to be known as the 'Sister's Arm'. Stricken with the dreadful disease cancer, Dora would not let others know of it and for months continued to be the bright, cheery Sister that she had been.

I turn to a third aspect of Sarada Devi's religion which removes it far beyond the frontiers of creed and race. The secret of her burning love for others lay in her life of prayer. She was unflagging in her *japa* for all her disciples. She asked, 'Since I have taken their responsibilities, should I not see to their welfare?' To a disciple who complained that austerities had led him nowhere she gave the piece of advice: 'God is not like fish or vegetables, that you can buy Him for a price.' Love Him and He will be yours. On another occasion, she said: 'Who is able to renounce all for His sake? Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God.'

The confessions of other great women mystics make it plain how near to each other they are in their inner life. Lucie-Christine sensed a Light, an Attraction, and a Power:

> A Light which showed me how I could belong completely to God alone in the world...; an Attraction by which my heart was subdued and delighted; a Power which inspired me with a generous resolution, and in some way placed in my hands the means of carrying it out.

Madame Martin confessed:

> My spirit became more and more simplified, making fewer and fewer inward or outward acts.... But my soul in its depths said continually these words: 'Oh, my love, be Thou blessed!'; even these alone, 'My God, my God.' These fundamental words filled me with sweet food.

Angela of Foligno exclaimed:

> Oh, my beloved sons; Every vision, every revelation, all sweetness and emotion, all knowledge, all contemplation availeth nothing if a man knoweth not God and himself!

Christianity, many of us tend to suppose, is a 'Father-centred' religion having little in common with the 'Mother Worship' of India. But the great Julian of Norwich after likening men to babes lovable even in their wickedness, conjured up a supreme image:

> A child, when it is a-hurt or adread, runneth hastily to the mother for help with all its might. So willeth He that we do, as a meek child saying thus, 'My kind mother, my gracious mother, my dearworthy mother, have mercy on me! I have made myself foul and unlike Thee, and I nor may nor can amend it but with Thy help!

Julian claimed 'two manners of beholding': the one endless, continuant love, with secureness of keeping and blissful salvation; for of this was all the shewing and the other of the common teaching of Holy Church in which I was afore informed and grounded.' Orthodox Hindus, one might suppose, would not care very much for Eastern music. Yet when Sister Nivedita and others sang resurrection-hymns to the accompaniment of a small French organ, the Holy Mother comprehended them with a knowledge and certainty which only 'some high and arduous form of scholarship can vouchsafe'. Doubtless, Sarada Devi

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too had 'two manners of beholding': one according to the 'shewing' and the other according to the common teaching of Hinduism. Not all the scruples, discretions and counsels of the orthodox round her could deter her from living and eating with European disciples like Sister Nivedita. 'Learn to make the whole world your own', her message ran, 'No one is a stranger'.

A tentative question posed by Sister Nivedita, who regarded Sarada Devi as Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood, can be answered only by a dialectical reconciliation of extremes. The Holy Mother was not only the last of an Old Order; she was also the beginning of a New Order. Old, yet new; that is always the paradox of great mysticism. The Abbe Huvelin said of the mystics: They do good by what they are, rather than by what they do. Great and imperishable as the deeds of Sarada Devi are, she should be remembered not for what she did, but for what she was: Radiant and Triumphant Womanhood beyond the creeds of the world.

THE HOLY MOTHER: HER DIVINITY

Swami Sundarananda

It was on the last part of 1912 that I had the good fortune to see Sarada Devi, popularly known as the Holy Mother, for the first time at the 'Udbodhan', Bagh-bazar, Calcutta. A zamindar friend of mine and his aristocratic old mother, who was an orthodox Vaishnava devotee, accompanied me. We entered the house in the morning and bowed before Swami Saradananda, who was seated in the eastern room on the left side of the entrance. He expressed satisfaction to know that the old lady had been passing her last days at Navadwip in spiritual Sadhana. She impertinently asked the Swami, 'Have you got any spiritual experience?' He instantly retorted with annoyance, 'Have I here been cutting grass then?' and became very grave all on a sudden. I felt out of sorts in the face of his uncommon gravity. Therefore, I touched his feet in reverence and went to see the Holy Mother. My companions followed me.

On entering the room of her worship we prostrated before a likeness of Ramakrishna installed on an altar and took the dust of the feet of the Holy Mother, who ordered us to sit by her side. She enquired about our whereabouts and graciously blessed me after knowing from my friend that I was a follower of Ramakrishna and used to celebrate his birthday anniversary at our village.

At this time, I did not know much about the Holy Mother except that she was the Divine Consort of Ramakrishna and had been worshipped by him as the Divine Mother. However, after a short discussion about Sridhāma Navadwip, the old lady who was a bigoted widow, again very insolently asked the Holy Mother, 'Your husband has passed away. You are a Brahmin widow. Why are you

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wearing a bordered cloth?' She quietly replied,

'Thakur is still living. I worship him daily and see him, and his devotees also do the same'.

I was really disgusted with both the questions of the old lady, but was highly surprised, and was also satisfied with their uncommon replies. Just at that time, two gentlemen entered into the room and the Holy Mother began to talk with them very affectionately. I bowed before her feet with a sincere desire to see her again. She appeared gracious to me by her loving glance. Since then, I saw the Holy Mother several times at the 'Udbodhan' without witnessing any memorable event. The appearance of the Holy Mother had a very striking similarity with that of my mother. That was another cause of temptation for visiting her occasionally. Just before the day of her Mahāsamādhi, Swami Saradananda, the guard and servant of the Holy Mother, allowed me to have a *darshan* of her sacred feet from a little distance.

After my first visit to the Holy Mother, I gradually read and heard many things about her, which led me to an intellectual understanding and appreciation of her Divinity to some extent. All her biographers and close associates testify unanimously that Ramakrishna not only worshipped her formally, but actually saw the Divine Mother Herself in her person. The Master himself also clearly supported this fact by saying to her on a memorable occasion, 'The Mother who is the Deity in the temple, the mother who gave birth to me and now resides in the Nahabat,—even she is now massaging my feet. I look on you in that light—as the embodiment of the Divine Mother.' He sent his young disciple Sarada Prasanna, later known as Swami Trigunatitananda, for taking initiation from her and gave him a hint by quoting a verse, which says, 'Infinite and inscrutable are the ways of the Maya of Radha. Millions of Krishnas and Ramas are created, sustained and destroyed by it!' He warned his nephew Hridaya who once spoke to her scornfully, saying, 'You may be saved if the being that resides in this body raises its hood, but if the being that is in her is angry, even Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara will not be able to save you.' On one occasion, Ramakrishna said that she was an incarnation of Sarasvati, born to bestow knowledge on others. He once told her, 'The people round about live like worms in darkness. You should look after them'. At one time, the faith of Yogin-Ma, a disciple of Ramakrishna, was shaken about the Holy Mother. Soon afterwards, when she was meditating on the bank of the Ganges, Ramakrishna appeared before her in vision and said, 'Can anything ever make the Ganges impure? Can anything defile its waters? Regard her (the Holy Mother) too in the same way. Never have any doubt about her. Know that she and this (referring to himself) are identical.'

All these are positive proofs that Sri Ramakrishna himself unambiguously declared her as being the Divine Mother and respected her as such till his Mahāsamādhi. It is a well-known fact that Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Saradananda and other direct disciples of the Master, regarded her as the Divine Mother, graciously incarnated in human form for the salvation of humanity.

The Holy Mother herself also directly and indirectly revealed her Divinity in various ways from time to time. She rarely spoke about herself. On rare occasions, she was seen to make such statements about herself, as, 'In the midst

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worldly activities, whenever I desire, I understand with a flash that all this is nothing but a play of Mahamaya.' Once a disciple told her, 'Mother, after having seen you, people will not respect the various Goddesses any more.' 'Why not?' She replied, 'They are all my parts.' She said to a very close relative on one occasion, 'Don't regard me as your relative; I can leave this body at once, if I so desire.' These are undoubtedly the statements of a liberated soul or a divine person, who has identified herself with the Primordial Energy of the Universe or Brahman. On another occasion she said to a disciple, 'If we do not accept sins and sorrows of others, and do not assimilate them who else will do so? Who else will bear the responsibilities of the sinner and the afflicted?' 'Thakur has left me behind for manifesting the Motherhood of God to the world.' Only an incarnation of the Divine Mother in human form can make such bold statements.

With this kind of intellectual idea about the Divinity of the Holy Mother I had the good fortune to sit at her sacred feet on two occasions, but her divinity was not revealed to me at any time. I saw her as an ordinary mortal being. Bhagavān Sri Krishna has disclosed the reason for this by saying in the Gitā:

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।
मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥

'I am covered with Yogamaya, hence I do not expose Myself to all. The ignorant cannot know My birthless and deathless nature.' *B. G. VII-25.*

The Holy Mother was really covered with her Yogamaya; nay, she was Yogamaya personified. Therefore, without her grace, it was utterly impossible for an ignorant person like me to see her birthless and deathless nature—her Divinity. On the other hand, all those who had the rare privilege of coming in intimate contact with her, said, that her divinity did not consist in the display of any miracle, but in the manifestation of high spiritual experience, unique purity, uncommon renunciation, universal Motherhood and in her readiness to help all without any distinction of caste, creed or colour, even regardless of their merits.

AN INKLING

SWAMI GAURISWARANANDA

I had the hobby of gardening even from my childhood. In the courtyard and the fringes of the Mother's house, (at Jayrambati), on the sides of the tank I grew plants of various flowers. Mother used to be very happy seeing those flowers. One day at noon after her noon rest I found the Mother loosening the earth at the roots of a jasmine plant. 'You have not to do this, I shall do,' when with these words I snatched away the instrument from her hand she said, 'You have been doing everything. I love jasmine. The season for its flowers is about to come. And so I was just making a little place for pouring water at its roots.' One day I took to the Mother a graft of lemon which I had myself done. There were seven or eight fruits in its branches. Mother was immensely pleased and began to declare to all, 'Ah, see how intelligent is my child! He has brought out a graft with fruits.' When flowers blossomed for the first time in the 'Padma-karavi' plant, Mother did not allow anyone to pick them. She said, 'Ramamaya must come and see how profusely his plant has blossomed!' As soon as I went there on a Saturday Mother dragged me by my hand near the plant and said, 'Ah, see, how beautiful flowers have come. What a sweet fragrance!' She then gave me a basket. I picked the flowers with my own hands and then she worshipped the Lord with those flowers.

One day I broke a big branch of a myrobalan tree bearing fruits and presented it to the Mother. Mother was displeased at this. She said that one should not break a fruit-bearing branch of a tree, specially that of a myrobalan tree. This particular myrobalan tree stood on the bank of Amodar. Amodar flows northwards from there. Mother further said, 'The entire pantheon of gods dwell under the myrobalan tree.' If one practises Japa and meditation under this tree one gets better results.' 'One can use the leaves of this tree in place of *Bilva* leaves for worship,' with these words she asked me to pick the leaves of the branch for the worship of the day.

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REDEEMING GRACE OF THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER

Wolfram H. Koch

In the history of great spiritual souls we find some outstanding examples of a close friendship between a man and a woman of so far-reaching a consequence that it became a message of hope for all, a message that our modern lop-sided civilization would do well to take to heart and to ponder over. In some of them it is as if one soul had incarnated in them both and used two human vessels for its expression and the complete fulfilment of its mission in this world.

Theirs was a love like that of the moth for the light, utterly unavoidable, a love that knew no obstacle, that often seemed a kind of possession and insanity to the worldly-minded, that penetrated through the different forms and saw beyond. Such a love will always be sexless because it alone expresses perfect unity; and sex, in whatever form it appears, must differentiate and by differentiating creates division and strife.

If, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, the whole world is a huge lunatic asylum full of lunatics running madly after money and women and fame and power, the sanest and most intelligent persons among them will naturally run after that which can cause them no loss and no disappointment and, at the same time, give them freedom and peace.

A dead heart cannot attain anything. As St. Francois de Sales wrote to St. Jeanne de Chantal in one of his letters: *Les coeurs a demi-morts, a quoi sont-ils bons?*'—Of what use are half-dead hearts? True intensity of heart can achieve miracles, whereas the most wonderful intellectual theorizing will never lead us anywhere. The moment we gain the hea of a man, we gain the whole man. The is why our world is in urgent need people whose whole life is one burni love that gives radiance to every wo they speak or write, to every instructi and advice they impart, that makes eve action of theirs bright and luminous a redeeming.

In one of the beautiful apocryphal sa ings attributed to Jesus Christ it is sai

> 'I made my appearance in the midst the world and appeared to them in t flesh and found them all drunk, and no among them did I find thirsty, and m soul is sad over the children of men, th they are blind in their hearts and do n see, poor, and do not know their poverty

So, for the worldly-minded there m be something suspicious in a close relatio ship between persons of different sex; f they cannot realize, nay, in many cas not even accept in theory, the possibili of a union of heart and will and endeavo on a plane where the fact of being a m or a woman dwindles into utter insigni cance.

To have lived a life of unsullied puri in spite of the intimateness of their lo for each other argues the sincerity a depth of their aspiration and the hig degree of moral perfection they had attai ned. Their love for the ideal had burn away all the dross of the baser side their nature and left only that which imperishable. Such a love is a consta stream, scarcely conscious of itself, whi nothing can obstruct or turn away fro its course. And this love always transfor its object and the lover.

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In the West the most beautiful examples of such friendships are those of St. Francis and St. Clare, the Blessed Seuse and the Dominican nun Elsbeth Stagel of Toess, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, and St. Francois de Sales and St. Jeanne de Chantal. Their lives are so complementary that their mission could never have been fulfilled without their spiritual unity. For in a great mission there must always be a place for both men and women. It must always be able to reach the homes of the world and give them a new light, the ideal of a new perfection. If it cannot do this, it must remain sterile and dead and after some time turn evil, as everything that is dead is bound to spread poison when it begins to decay. Such decaying fragments of spiritual truths have so often become the bane of religion and turned it into something demoniacal and pernicious.

The meeting of St. Francis and St. Clare is one of these strange apparently preordained facts the significance of which can only be understood by a later time that is able to judge the development of a movement and to see things in their proper place and perspective, without passion and without warring interests.

When on Palm Sunday, 1212, Chiara degli Scifi, Countess of Sassorosso, secretly left her father's house accompanied by a trusted companion, and went down the steep path leading to the Perziuncela where the friars awaited her and Francis received her solemn vows and cut off her beautiful hair with his own hands, offering it to Brother Fire, the second Franciscan Order was born, that of the Clarisses, without which the Franciscan idea and message would have remained incomplete. The girl belonging to the most aristocratic circles of Assisi,—and the son of a merchant as her beloved teacher and example,—what a strange picture fraught with a meaning that at that time must have been unknown to both!

To-day both are buried at Assisi, Francis in the majestic church bearing his name and proudly standing on the lower slopes of the old city, which in its very imposingness and towering mass is in itself a betrayal of the Franciscan message,—Clare at the other end not far from the castle in the church built in her honour, and watched over by her spiritual daughters. But their spirit is still alive all over the Umbrian planes and hills and still seems to make Assisi one of the blessed places of the earth, timeless and full of peace and calm for those who are able to open their hearts to their loving influence. And it is difficult to say who was the stronger of the two, when one thinks of the many defeats and setbacks the Franciscan ideal had to suffer, and how often Francis' dream has been rudely shattered and betrayed. Of all his followers Clare certainly belonged to the very few who never doubted the truth of his vision and never sacrificed his dearest wish to her own comfort or that of her sisters, taking their human frailty as a cheap excuse for relaxing his rule while continuing to pay lip-service to his highest ideal,—and whom no one could tempt away from the road she had chosen on the day when Francis received and accepted her vows without waiting for any sanction of Church or family.

The great friend and spiritual daughter of the Blessed Seuse, the Dominican nun Elsbeth Stagel, had been dedicated to God from her earliest childhood. From the very beginning of her conventual life she tried to come in touch with all that could help her in her spiritual unfoldment, and as soon as she came to hear of Heinrich Seuse, who at that time was living in

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the Dominican monastery at Constance, not very far from her own convent of Toess, she felt an overwhelming desire to have him for her guide and teacher. This was the beginning of a wonderful correspondence between these two ardent souls. Seuse also came to see her at Toess and had long talks with her concerning the first steps of his own religious life and the exercises which had helped him most in his growth. In his answer to her first letter, he tells her:

> 'Right blessedness does not lie in fine words, it lies in good works. But if you ask about such high things for the sake of some earthly gain, I advise you to renounce it, and that you take what is suitable for you; for you still seem to be an unpractised sister. Take an example from the Friends of God,—how they first allowed themselves to be gripped by the life and the suffering of Jesus Christ. For thus is a beginning man stimulated and led on to reach the next higher step. Though God the Lord could give this all at once, he usually does not do so. For generally everything must be suffered and fought for and acquired.'

Her reply to this letter is very typical of her attitude and clearly shows her sincerity and the truth of her longing for the more perfect forms of the religious life. She writes:

> 'Dear Father, know that I do not feel any desire for fine words but only for a holy life; and that I am determined to attain fairly and honestly. However it may hurt, be it suffering or letting go or dying,—whatever it be, that may take me a step higher, that must be endured till the very end. And do not be frightened of my frail feminine nature; for whatever you think fit to command me that hurts our inborn nature, I dare take upon me. And begin at the lowest step and go on instructing me, as a young pupil is taught first what belongs to his childhood and then led on and on until he himself becomes a master of wisdom.'

And from that day it is wonderful to see with what love and insight the Blessed Seuse begins guiding her through all her bodily and mental troubles, and how at the same time, through her influence, he himself gains clearer knowledge and deeper certainty of the truths he is teaching her and others; and how close their hearts grow to each other, becoming in many respects one soul and one aspiration.

Without Elsbeth Stagel's unwavering dedication to her beloved teacher and friend, Seuse's famous autobiography, which is considered the earliest spiritual autobiography of the West, would never have been written or at least given the marvellous intensity of feeling which still makes it so living and even vibrant with life in our day; for it was she who secretly wrote down all that he told her so that nothing might be lost. And these notes later on passed into his hands, after she had died. She is also the author of the biographies of some of the nuns of Toess who were remarkable for their mystical experiences and the exceptional holiness of their lives.

St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, the reformers of the Carmelite Order, are probably the greatest saints and mystics of Spain, and they, too, were in many ways complementary to each other. St. John of the Cross may not have possessed Teresa's intellectual gifts, her practical, humorous and unemotional way of looking at facts and at people, but he was absolutely necessary for her work. After her reform of the Carmelite nuns she had been eagerly looking for a man clever and talented enough to undertake that of the Carmelite monks and able to share her ideal and understand her ex-

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periences. So she was full of enthusiasm when she met St. John of the Cross and found him to be the very man she had been waiting for. After her first meeting with him and another friar, who was in his company, she ran to her nuns full of joy, crying: 'I have already a friar and a half for beginning my reform!' hinting at the unusual smallness of his stature.

Of the two, Teresa certainly possessed greater commonsense and also a greater gift of humour, judging the frailties and absurdities of her fellow-men less severely and fully realizing that the ordinary monk or nun must content themselves with simpler and more modest forms of striving. Her friend and disciple was the more poetical soul, but he had little of Teresa's solicitude for his weaker brethren and a far less human sense of their limitations and failings. In him the desire for the highest had almost obliterated the understanding for the less perfect, who in all sincerity try to reach a higher level, but lack both the required tenacity and the unflinching spirit of austerity. But the successful reform of the Carmelites would have been unthinkable if the two great souls had not met and their two different natures had not combined and formed the necessary whole for achieving Teresa's end.

In St. Francois de Sales and St. Jeanne de Chantal we find much less of rigorous penitence and discipline, a far more human, humanistic attitude typical of their time. If St. Teresa went to the very extreme in her reform, condemning any relaxation of the old rules of the Order, St. Francois de Sales wished to bring spirituality to every door, to the layman as well as to the religious, to the physically weak as well as to the strong, to the married as well as to the unmarried including them all in his scheme of a truly religious life. In Jeanne de Chantal he found the complementary soul who was able fully to understand his plan and to follow him with unconditional devotion and one-pointedness.

Jeanne Fremyot, Baroness de Rabutin-Chantal, was thirty-three years old when she first met Francois de Sales at Dijon where he was preaching his Lent-sermons. She had lost her husband in a hunting accident and had a great desire to give herself wholly to God, but the spiritual director she had found had been too exacting and too tyrannical in his demands. So, when she listened to Francois de Sales at the Sainte-Chapelle at Dijon, she at once felt irresistibly drawn to him and began to call him 'a saint' in her heart. He, too, immediately watched the young widow who was listening to him so attentively and felt a strange attraction for her.

For more then four years he directs her by letters, which are a veritable treatise on Christian perfection and contain many ideas which he later used in his famous *Introduction a la vie devote* and his *Traite de l'amour de Dieu*. He helps Jeanne de Chantal in fighting her temptations and scruples and uncertainties. And two years later he tells her for the first time of his project to found a new institution or congregation. But it took him another three years to work out the first rules. On June 6th, 1610, the Order of the Visitation was founded, Jeanne de Chantal becoming its first Mother Superior.

Under his loving guidance she had to learn many a hard lesson of unquestioning obedience and submission. And she was too ardent a soul to learn it easily and without pain. In one of his numerous letters to her we find a very typical passage containing the very gist of his advice to her.

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'Simplify your judgment' he writes, 'do not have too many objections but walk simply and with confidence, do not look so much in this or that direction, but keep your eyes steadfastly focussed on God and on yourself.'

This idea is very typical of Francois de Sales and his way of guiding people,—this keeping all one's faculties centred in God without, however, living in seclusion; and it is this that he wants to be realized by all, even by those living at court and constantly moving in worldly society and amid the allurements of sex and wealth; and this certainly is a very severe form of austerity for the person who sincerely tries to put it into practice in his own life.

In spite of the intensity of his love for Jeanne de Chantal he admonishes her repeatedly to strip herself resolutely of the merely human in her feelings, 'for we must have our love united so simply and so perfectly in God that nothing ties us to ourselves'. There is nothing sentimental or effeminate in their friendship, which is so often characteristic of purely human affections.

'One must possess a manly heart' he writes to her. 'Do not let yourself be frightened by darkness, nor by weakness, not by obstacles if our soul only has the firm will to live and to die for the service of God.'

They, as it were, reciprocally vitalized their spiritual powers and their readiness to renounce everything for the sake of the highest love. And never do we find anything washy in their sentiments.

* * *

Coming to our own times we scarcely dare to speak of the two Divine personalities that appeared in the last century to give us the patterns for the true woman and the true man in their perfection, showing us the most spiritualized form of union between husband and wife. The marriage between Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi was in the truest sense of the term a spiritual marriage, so high above all ordinary conceptions that to many it may seem quite unbelievable while it is bound to rouse the angry protest of those to whom the end of marriage is and must be physical union. For such people the realization of the Universal Mother in every woman on earth is utterly wrong and must create serious complexes. To them it ties, as it were, a man for good to the mother idea and brings about a cramped and unhealthy attitude with regard to women, bearing very evil fruits. In the West there has never been the cult of Woman in a spiritual sense since the advent of Christianity —not even in the Roman Catholic Church in spite of the very high veneration given to the Holy Virgin; and this fact makes it much harder for the Westerner to understand the significance of the Divine Play manifesting itself through these two holy consorts. From the very beginning there was nothing carnal in their relations. Sri Sarada Devi willingly renounced all ideas of conjugal rights because the love she cherished for her husband was too great and too genuine to wish to drag him down to a lower plane and to try to make him forget his mission in the world. Sri Ramakrishna himself stressed this point later on when speaking to some of his disciples:

'Had she not been so pure'—he said—'who knows whether I might not have lost my self-control from her inducements? After marriage I prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, remove even the least taint of carnality from the mind of my wife." When I lived with her, I understood that the Mother had really granted my prayer.'

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When we read of the wonderful ceremony of the Shodasi-Puja, we are filled with reverence and driven to worship such holiness in both the husband and wife. In it the new ideal of conjugal life in which the carnal side of our human nature is completely transformed found its highest consummation.

There are many who have not yet recognized the important part Sri Sarada Devi had to play in fulfilling this aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's message for the world; for his ideal could never have been fully translated into life if she had not been his equal in purity and devotion. Even to-day we find people who pity the Holy Mother on account of the frustration she had to suffer in her conjugal life by Sri Ramakrishna's depriving her of her greatest right as a woman, that of motherhood. But this is no wonder when we remember that her own mother felt the deepest sympathy for her for that very reason and openly expressed it to her son-in-law. But here, too, Sri Ramakrishna's answer is full of significance: 'Your daughter', he said, 'will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as 'Mother',— which was to prove utterly true after his passing away, when she had to continue his work and give initiation and solace to all those who came to seek her grace. All such worldly criticisms are extremely short-sighted, and it is certain that nothing could have been a greater loss both for her and for the world than if she had asserted her claim over him as his wife and dragged him down to the ordinary level of life, having children of her own like thousands and thousands of other women, but giving up the universality and greatness of her motherhood. By her purity and devotion to her great teacher and husband she became the 'Mother' for innumerable despairing 'children' whose burdens she was ready to bear, and who came to her in ever growing numbers until the year of her passing away. What ordinary mother is there whose life is so blessed and so full of grace and Divine fulfilment?

Once one of his Gurus told Sri Ramakrishna when he found that he was a married man:

> 'What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the knowledge of Brahman, who can keep intact his renunciation and discrimination even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look upon man and woman alike as Atman and deal with them accordingly. A man with an idea of the distinction of sex may be a good Sadhaka, but he is still far from his goal.'

So, by the example of a high spiritual union without any trace of carnality both Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna have given our time a pattern for the conduct of all those who really and sincerely wish to transmute their lower nature and attain their true manhood—or womanhood, a pattern which none of the Great Ones who came before their time had given humanity and which, therefore, is of the greatest importance for us. For in every really great spiritual message there are always two factors: a general one proclaiming eternal unchangeable laws, and a special one being of utmost significance for the time in which and for which it is being preached. Sri Sarada Devi is the ideal wife and mother and nun, Sri Ramakrishna the ideal God-man and husband, and, at the same time, both are infinitely more than that for all those who are able to understand the deeper meaning and the unsurpassed uniqueness of their Divine Play.

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WHAT MAKES SIMPLE HOLY MOTHER SO POWERFUL

Swami Pavitrananda

From the news that is coming from India we find that The Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother is being celebrated in many places on a grand scale. This makes us very glad. For instance I found in a recent issue of an Indian newspaper four items—some elaborately displayed—of the Centenary meetings, and this in a paper not ordinarily interested in the spiritual aspects of our activities.

Now, what is the reason that so many persons are evincing interest in the Holy Mother's message? This is all the more surprising as in her life there were not many of her activities which attracted the attention of the general public. Hers was a quiet retired life. In her early days at Dakshineswar only a few intimate devotees had the opportunity to meet her, and at a later period circumstances also restricted the number of those who could see her. Still her influence on the lives of many was great, very great, and after her passing away this influence is increasing steadily. What is the reason for this, one wonders.

Perhaps the answer is in what Swami Vivekananda said in one of his talks. He said that if one goes to a mountain cave far, far away from human habitation and thinks noble thoughts, those thoughts will break through the walls of the cave, and reach and influence people. Thoughts are powerful. This is not an occult phenomenon but a plain statement of fact and experience. There are many instances of saints who by their very silence would influence and transform the lives of people who came into contact with them. The Holy Mother lived her life, and the influence of that life is unfolding itself. A saint or a prophet lives a concentrated life of thought, and the influence of that life lasts for centuries after his or her exit from the arena of the world increasing in momentum as time passes.

Christ had twelve disciples, of these one betrayed him and the rest became shaky in their faith when they were put to test by circumstances. But now consider the millions of persons who find in the life of the Son of God the source of strength, solace and sustenance. This is the case with every prophet. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'How many persons could recognize the greatness of Rama or any other Incarnation in his lifetime? Very few.' It is impossible for ordinary persons with human frailties and ignorance to evaluate the greatness of saints and prophets. Was it not also the case with Sri Ramakrishna himself? Persons who were devoted to him in his lifetime were very few in number. It was after his passing away that his life and message began to spread in wider and wider circles of influence over larger and larger geographical areas.

Is this not being repeated in the Holy Mother? The first person who really recognized her greatness was Ramakrishna. Others were ignorant or half awake to her greatness, or ot best under the spell of her overwhelming motherly affection. In 1894, eight years after the passing of Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda wrote from America to one of his brother disciples,

> 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than

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Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings, are all paramount to me...Please pardon me. I am a little bigoted here, as regards Mother.'

A historian, or one who likes to make an objective study of the life of the Mother will naturally like to find facts which indicate her greatness instead of mere sentiments. Literature that has been published about her is not very large. This is so because one does not easily dare write about her, her personality is so overpowering. In the present year of her Birth Centenary more books about her and reminiscences of her are being put in print. This is very good. Posterity will be thankful to us. Every titbit of her life, properly authenticated, should be recorded so that one may be able to see how Divinity putting on human form acts and reacts to circumstances of earthly existence.

As one reads with care the literature that has been published about the Holy Mother, one feels that she is overwhelmingly greater than the earthly events that constituted her life. As for instance: she blesses a person. The few words of her blessing become the source of strength to this person throughout his or her whole life. They haunt him, they are with him, they protect him, they strengthen him. We cannot explain the situation by judging objectively but we find many, many such instances.

Another thing we find strikingly revealed when we analyze the record, is her infinite motherly affection for one and all with absolutely no distinction of caste, creed or geographical area. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family in an obscure village, she could make anyone—from any part of the world—feel that she was a mother to him or her. Caste distinction of Hindu orthodoxy had no meaning for her; differences between wealth and poverty, between a saint and a sinner, were completely obliterated in her mind. And how tremendous was her love! A grown-up or an old person would feel himself a child in her presence. And how deep was that love! A disciple writes,

'While at home I had loved my mother intensely and she too had abundant affection for me. But could that love stand comparison with such unthought-of kindness and care as flowed from the Holy Mother? Nay, she is the Mother of my innumerable past incarnations—the Mother of eternal time—the Mother of my very being.'

And while earthly love, however pure and noble, still binds, her affection had a liberating effect on the bonds of ignorance. One felt the bondage of flesh fast vanishing, if it had not already disappeared. Of course, it is a subjective experience. But when such experiences happen in the case of many, it is no longer a subjective matter. It is a solid phenomenon.

These phenomena repeat themselves even now everywhere in the world. Here in America one sees how the Holy Mother has touched the lives of persons who have known of her simply through meagre literature. How and why they feel so intensely is hard to explain simply from matter-of-fact reasons. One can only say it is the power of the life she lived.

She, however, did not live only in a world of thought, her compassionate heart took in the suffering of all. Her sympathy was for the poor, the needy, the distressed. She herself toiled, worked hard and endured infinite pain as she touched the lives and sufferings of those near her. In this respect she was in close touch with the world of grim reality. Her innate culture was so great that she could understand all minds and easily see through the

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problems and difficulties of persons belonging to diverse nationalities. Hers was perfectly a modern mind. Indeed she constituted a bridge between the past and the present, between the old and the new.

History of India from the Vedic times shows instances of many saints who were women; in other religions we also learn of women saints. In the present time the Holy Mother typifies the spiritual heights a woman can reach, even facing the circumstances through which a woman has to pass. As such her life is an ideal, an example to all the women of the world showing that when one reaches perfection, he or she inspires and uplifts all—men and women alike.

SRI SARADA DEVI: THE TRUE REPRESENTATIVE OF DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

A Western Devotee

This is a simple recital of faith.

In the play of worldly life every one of us is apt to act in a way that reveals a profound belief in the importance of his part in the human drama. We are apt to become so engrossed in this seemingly obvious importance that our senses become too dulled to perceive the finer motivating influences, to sense anything fine and deep, or to realize that our every act has its subtle overtones of great significance.

But throughout history there have been men and women who by an indomitable will to probe true values delved deep into the essence of Being and found out the mockery of the human surface-show. Those men and women are the true heroes and conquerors in world history, and they tell us from their own realization that there is a spirit in man that is closer than thought and nearer then breath, and that Self or Spirit is the sole power behind all the manifold and intricate complications of the human play.

Unfortunately common man is so preoccupied with his worldly ambitions, so fascinated by the lure of worldly goals that he pays little heed to the teachings of saints and sages about his true Self. For that reason—so the Scriptures aver—Divine Incarnations out of their infinite compassion for man now and then come down on earth to deliver their divine message to him practically and concretely on the human level. They take on a human body with its frailties and diseases, its dependence on food and subjection to physical and social surroundings. On that level they show the shining example of God in man and prove as a matter of actual experience God's kinship to man.

Though bearing the burden of a physical body their minds ever dwell in the bliss of Reality; worldly vicissitudes do not affect them and worldly attractions can not touch their Spirit. Paradoxically they are fully congnisant of their divine omnipotence and at the same time are humble beyond conception. They are childlike in temperament, and knowledge of ultimate Truth cannot inflate their ego.

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Sri Ramakrishna was such a prophet of our own time who came to us with his mission to enlighten the humanity of our day. His message was one of love, compassion, knowledge, renunciation and a whole-hearted acceptance of Truth in all religions—a broad and all-encompassing outlook that was never equalled in any Revelation in prior religious history.

Sri Sarada Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna, appreciated perhaps more then anyone else his spiritual stature, and throughout her long ministry worshipped Ramakrishna, as one might say, with her every breath as the Incarnation of Divinity. Ramakrishna on his part looked upon Sarada Devi as the veritable embodiment of the Divine Motherhood of the universe. To Hindus the concept of the Motherhood of God is a familiar one. In the West, however, it is a novel concept—new and strange. Yet to many Westerners of a devotional type it makes a strong and overwhelming appeal–the Divine Mother Who gives birth, protects, coddles or else chastises out of Her infinite love and grace.

Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was indeed the true representative of Divine Motherhood. Many and arduous were the demands upon her motherly services—both worldly and spiritual—during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna and after his passing, when the mantle of his divine ministry fell on her brave shoulders. She never shirked any difficulty or duty. Whether in the little cramped room in the Nahabat where she cooked meal for the Master and his disciples, or at Cossipore where she attended to the Master's diet during his severe illness, or later at Kamarpukur or at Jayrambati she showed that there can be a harmonious commingling of full attention to commonplace worldly duties and the continuous immersion at the same time in highest spiritual reaches of peace and realization.

Above all she never faltered in her role of motherhood. Her mother's heart took in all castes, all lands, all faiths. The children of the East and the children of the West were her children without distinction of disparagement. Incidentally, in some mysterious way that Mother's love has reached out far and wide and found a response in many a Western devotee's heart. Who can balk the tide of such sweet love when that tide overtakes him?

Though living a life of great austerity herself, her tender motherly solicitude for her disciples vouchsafed the practice of austerities only to the very few who were young, strong and temperamentally suited to them. For others she made the load light. There must be no stress or strain, mental or physical, in spiritual practices. Meditation must be spontaneous, never forced. If meditation is hard to achieve, do Japam—call on the easy services of your heart, head and hand. Japa will purify your mind and evoke yearning in the heart for spiritual realization. If you cannot do Japam, remember the Master. Holy recollection and prayer are potent factors to steady the mind and help it transcend the pull of worldly allurement.

In this connection let me quote from the booklet, *A Glimpse of the Holy Mother*:

> 'During her last illness she used to keep awake till 2 a. m. When asked why she was unable to sleep, she said, 'How can I sleep my child? All these children come to me with great longing and take initiation, but most of them do not practise Japa regularly. Why regularly? They do nothing at all. But since

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I have accepted the responsibility should I not see to their welfare? I do Japa for their sake.'

Throughout her teaching Holy Mother with consistent humility spoke of herself as only the instrument of the Master. But it is delightful to come across in the recorded talks with her disciples that now and then she would let slip a word in a flash of self-revelation that showed her full realization of her mission and power.

'Make no distinction between Ramakrishna and me,' she once told a disciple.

'I have realization in the palm of my hand,' she said on another occasion, and quickly changed the subject.

Also,

'Sri Ramakrishna left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world.'

The Holy Mother during her long ministry had voluntarily taken on a heavy spiritual responsibility towards the many disciples whom she initiated. Has the Holy Mother scuttled that responsibility when she passed out of her physical body? We believe that she has not. We believe that she still guides and helps and heals and still reaches aspiring souls in the East and in the West and blesses them with her Motherly grace, protection and initiation onto the path of Truth.

Great prophets have a power beyond our limited understanding. Whether in the physical body or out of it they promulgate their own message and somehow speak effectively to the human heart. We believe that Holy Mother's spiritual ministry is not finished. It is going on. It has only started on its career of divine service and will gain undreamed-of momentum with the natural course of time.

THE INNER PILOT

SWAMI VASUDEVANANDA

In 1915, we were doing famine relief work in Bankura. During the time of Jagaddhatri-puja we went from the relief-centre to Jayrambati to have the *darsan* of the Mother. One day the Mother was watching us taking our meals while some one was serving. Laughing she said:

'Just see what has happened. Sri Ramakrishna came. And by his grace the eyes of knowledge are being opened even in these children. They have left their parents and all and are engaged in doing the work of the Lord. But for the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, they would not have renounced the world so easily. Now you see, we have become their own people and their relatives and own people have grown strangers to them.'

* * *

Swami Visveswarananda had fallen ill. I was sent from the Math to Udbodhan for doing the worship in the shrine. One day I was meditating in the shrine before *aratrikam*,—(Holy Mother used to live in the same room)-while a severe controversy was raging downstairs over the first world war that was going on. I was feeling very much disturbed. The Mother was seated at a distance. Radhu was coming and going and asking this and that. The evening quiet of the Belur Math was totally absent here. But I was seated in the immediate vicinity of my Guru. Notwithstanding this my mind suffered the thought, 'Oh! where have I come! This terrific noise!' Just then Radhu spoke out, 'Aunti, let us go to Jayrambati.'

'Could it be so for your asking? We have to be exactly there where the Lord has chosen to keep us at a point of time.',

the Holy Mother replied. This struck me as a revelation. Aye, Mother was admonishing me alone here!—that one has to submit oneself to the will of the Lord through all states of circumstances and endure everything that came on the way. At once I was reminded of a saying of Sri Ramakrishna to the effect that one could not be liberated unless one had passed through all varieties of experiences. I felt an intense remorse within myself. My Guru was in my front and I was thinking of going elsewhere! While prostrating before the Mother after *aratrikam* I prayed to her, 'Mother deign to bless me that I may have unshakable devotion to your lotus feet under all sorts of circumstances. May I never forget your lotus feet.' The Mother passed her hand on my head.

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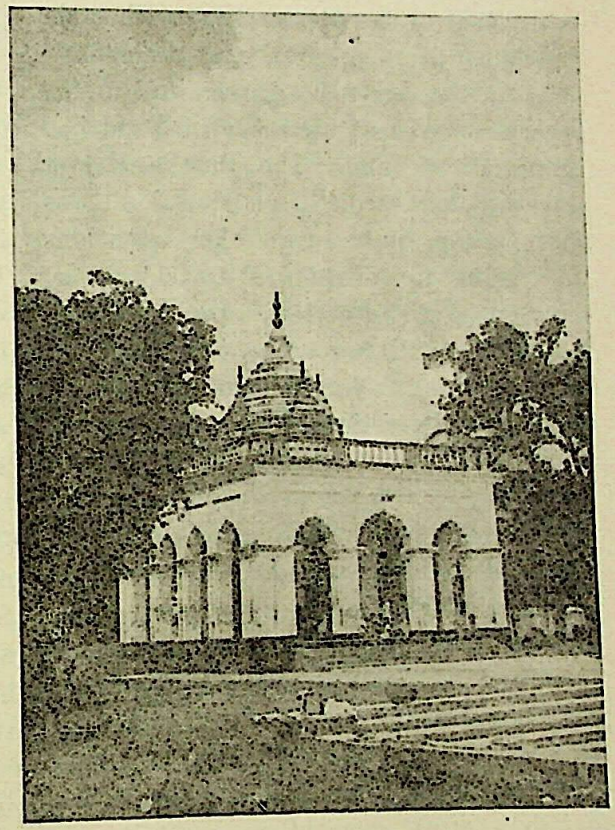
THE HOLY MOTHER—HER PART IN THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT

Swami Tapasyananda

Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, lived a life of quiet retirement, but nonetheless she embodied in herself dynamic possibilities in the field of ideals and actions. To be born and brought up in rural surroundings; to be married at five; to cook for and serve one's husband; to visit temples, saints and places of pilgrimages; to dote over an imbecile niece; and to be preoccupied with visitors and guests—are commonplaces even in the humdrum life of any Indian housewife of the past generation. But to be worshipped by a saintly husband as the very embodiment of the Supreme Mother; to appreciate his spiritual aspirations and quickly grasp that one's supreme duty as wife lay in identifying oneself with those aspirations and in being his helpmate in working them out; to train oneself in a manner that befits one to be a worthy spiritual successor to a godly husband; to command the respect of innumerable devotees coming from every stratum of society; to minister to the spiritual needs of aspirants with a true insight into the stage of their evolution; to impress one and all with an unassumed yet overflowing sense of motherly love; and to combine in oneself the perfect ideals of a nun, a wife and a mother—these are achievements that would elevate a person to the dizzy heights where humanity shades off into Divinity.

In Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, we get such a mingling of the commonplace with the extraordinary, of human qualities with divine excellences.



Holy Mother's Shrine, Belur Math

The important part she played in fulfilling the life-mission of Sri Ramakrishna is not well understood by the world at large. The name of Sri Ramakrishna's great disciple Swami Vivekananda is so historic and his work so impressive that the vital contributions made by the other associates and disciples of the Great Master towards the fulfilment of his life's mission are often overlooked by superficial students of the Ramakrishna movement. So far as the Holy Mother is concerned, it will be no exaggeration to say that she is the real power behind the movement.

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Born in 1853 and wedded to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of five, she was brought into the Master's life almost at the start of her life's journey. Though she had a few contacts with him in those early days, the real process of integration of her life with that of the Master began when she made her first appearance at Dakshineswar at the age of eighteen drawn by the strange news that her husband had gone out of mind. Though the Master received her cordially on arrival, he was not perhaps quite sure of her intentions in coming to join him at Dakshineswar. So soon after she settled at Dakshineswar, he confronted her with the question, 'Do you want to drag me down into Maya?' Quickly and resolutely she gave the noble reply, 'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the religious path.' Another day it was her turn to elicit from the Master his attitude towards her. While massaging his feet she put to him the straight question; 'How do you look upon me?' Without a moment's hesitation Sri Ramakrishna answered: 'The Mother who is the Deity of the temple, the mother who gave birth to me and now lives in the Nahabat (music room of the temple)—even she is now massaging my feet. Verily, I look upon you as an embodiment of Motherhood'.

This confirmation of their attitude towards each other mark the beginning of the wonderful conjugal life of the holy couple in which the Master remained the perfect Brahmachari and Sri Sarada Devi the perfect Brahmacharini, while each became a tower of strength to the other because of their whole-hearted participation in the common ideal of God-realization.

There has hardly been another wife, a *Pativrata*, who helped her husband heart and soul in his chosen path in life as Sri Sarada Devi did—helped not only in relation to his individual spiritual life, but also in fulfilling his life-mission of giving birth to a new spiritual renaissance.

It was probably as a token of their having attained to this spiritual partnership that Sri Ramakrishna performed the great rite known as the Shodasi Pooja. In this rite Sri Sarada Devi was placed on the altar for the Divine Mother as her visible symbol and the Master offered worship to the Deity present as the maiden of immaculate purity. Thus was invoked in Sri Sarada Devi the presence of the Divine Mother, the Supreme Energy that was working through the Master. She thus became a vital part of Sri Ramakrishna's Mission and her life thereafter was devoid of all personal purposes, being devoted entirely to the fulfilment of the Master's life-work.

So long as the Master was alive, she remained more or less in the background, confining herself mainly to serving him and practising spiritual disciplines under his direction. But the Master himself had the clear idea that she would have to continue his spiritual ministry and so, besides preparing her for the work, actually commissioned her, saying, 'The people round about live like worms in darkness. You should look after them.' Again towards the close of his life he told her one day, 'Won't you do anything? Am I to do all?' To this the Holy Mother replied, 'I am only a woman. What can I do?' But the Master remarked; 'No, no. You have much to do.' So he gave her the spiritual competency to impart *mantras* and instructions to aspirants, and even in his own lifetime asked one of his disciples to receive instructions from her.

Sometime after the Master's demise the Holy Mother took up the role of the spiritual teacher, a function for which she was carefully prepared by the Master. To

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the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna themselves, she was a source of inspiration and guidance whenever they were in doubts and difficulties. Swami Yogananda, one of the direct disciples had not been given any mantra by the Master. After the Master's passing, the Swami was asked by the Master in a dream to go to the Holy Mother and take initiation. The Holy Mother also got a similar command from the Master repeatedly for three days. So she initiated him. This is a striking event, showing how the Master got his work done through her.

An equally impressive instance of this is found in connection with Swami Vivekananda himself. The Swami was at first undecided about his going to the West. He wanted to know the Master's will before he took a decision on this point. He had none but the Holy Mother to help him in this moment of indecision before taking up that momentous step in life, fraught with such far-reaching consequences both for himself and the world at large. He was just like Arjuna before the Mahabharata war, and one like Sri Krishna was required to strengthen the will of this modern hero. This friend and guide he found in the Holy Mother who asked him to go ahead without the least hesitation and assured him of the Master's blessing and protection. About this time the Holy Mother had a symbolic vision regarding the great part that the Swami was to play as a preacher of the Master's message. She saw Sri Ramakrishna getting down into the Ganga and his whole body dissolving into its sacred waters. She also saw Swami Vivekananda following him and taking and sprinkling large quantities of those waters on crowds of people with the cry, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna!'.

In the years that followed, her own role in the work became clearer and clearer. With the spread of the Master's message more and more spiritual aspirants, both from the East and the West, came for initiation and instruction in the practice of spiritual life. Swami Vivekananda passed away early, and Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Order was very strict and discriminating in the matter of giving spiritual initiation. It is a traditional belief that the spiritual teacher has to take the responsibility of his disciples and that initiating people who are unspiritual and given to bad ways of living has adverse effects on the teacher himself. It was perhaps this feeling that made the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna very discriminating in the matter of giving initiations. But the Master was a great reservoir of mercy. Through the Holy Mother his mercy flowed to all irrespective of their merits and qualifications. All who went to her were accepted with very few exceptions. The fact that they felt strongly inclined to be blessed by her was sufficient reason for her to give them initiation, and as their mother she was ready to take upon herself whatever adverse effects might befall her owing to the imperfections and sins of those whom she initiated. So Swami Premananda, a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once said, paying a tribute to the unparalleled mercy of the Holy Mother:

> 'We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison we could not ourselves take. She is giving refuge to everybody, accepting the sins of all and digesting the same.'

Thus through the tireless spiritual ministration of the Holy Mother, countless number of devotees got a new awakening in life and came within the purview of the spiritual movement associated with the name of Sri Ramakrishna.

But this is not all. Her part in the growth of the monastic organization,

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through which the Ramakrishna movement has radiated to all lands, is even more vital in certain respects. It was the Holy Mother who first realized the need of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples organizing themselves into a body for the purpose of propagating the Master's message. Though devoid of modern education and present-day ideas of planning and organized work, she was nonetheless guided towards this realization as much by her motherly heart as by her insight into the purpose of the Master's life. Naren, who became Swami Vivekananda later on had got together all the young men who had gathered round the Master and induced them to become Sannyasins, but this in itself had not given them the sense of a monastic community holding together for the achievement of a definite purpose. Their tendency was to take to a life of hard *tapasya* (austerity) in secluded spots or to go about from one place of pilgrimage to another as wandering Sannyasins. It was the Holy Mother who first realized the inadequacy of this ideal and prayed to the Master to consolidate his disciples into an order of monks for the propagation of his message.

About this she says as follows in one of her conversations with a disciple:

'How much did I weep and pray to the Master for my children. That is why you find monasteries and centres of work everywhere through his blessings. After the Master's demise his disciples renounced the world, found a temporary shelter and for a few days lived together. Then one by one they went out independently and began to roam hither and thither. That made me very sad. I prayed to the Master, saying, "O, Lord, you have been embodied in human form and you spent the period of your earthly existence with a few disciples. Now has everything ended with your passing away? In that case what need was there for your embodiment entailing so much suffering. I have seen in Brindavan and Benares so many holy men living on alms and having the shades of trees for shelter. There is no lack of Sadhus (holy men) of that type. I cannot bear to see my children, who have renounced all for your sake, wandering about for a morsel of food. It is my prayer, O Lord, that those who give up the world for your sake may not suffer for want of simple food and coarse clothing. It is also my prayer that my children should live together, clinging to you and your teachings and people afflicted with the sufferings of the world should come to them and get peace of mind by hearing from them your words. That is why you incarnated yourself in a human form."'

The heart-felt prayer of one like the Holy Mother carries infinite power with it. The Ramakrishna movement and the monastic organization that is at the back of it have sprung from the resolution she made in her pure and powerful mind. She is thus the bed-rock on which the spiritual edifice built by Sri Ramakrishna rests. She is in a very real sense the mother who gave birth to the spiritual movement associated with Sri Ramakrishna's name.

THE STORY OF ORIGIN

I went to see the monastery of Bodh Gaya. It was filled with various articles, and the monks did not suffer for want of funds. After seeing this I often wept before the Master and prayed, 'O Lord, my children (i. e. monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) have no place wherein to lay their heads. They have very little to eat. They trudge from door to door for a morsel of food. May they have a place like this!' Subsequently the Belur Math was established through the grace of the Master.

* * *

Our essential point is love. It is through love alone that the spiritual family of Sri Ramakrishna has grown and developed.

* * *

The whole world is engrossed in lust and gold. The monk must always practise renunciation and dispassion. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'O Sadhu, beware!'

HOLY MOTHER

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FALLACIOUS OPPOSITIONS

Jean Herbert

In this twentieth century of ours, we have come to consider such things as meekness and power, obedience and authority, rigidity of principles and tolerance, contemplation and action, as pairs of opposites. The same may be predicated of internal purity and freedom of action, love of kin and love of mankind, religious belief and open-mindedness, tradition and progress, idolatry and true religion, myth and truth, and many others. The more we manifest of the one, the less we think we shall be capable of expressing the other. Thus we have allowed purely artificial and untrue polarities to blot out from our mind the real oppositions: meekness and vanity, power and impotence, obedience and insubordination, authority and lack of influence, rigidity of principles and laxity of life, tolerance and intolerance, contemplation and superficiality, activity and laziness, love and ego-centricity, etc.

Of course, history, literature, and still more so Sacred Scriptures of the various races tell us insistently that our current view is wrong, and when we take time to think honestly, we must admit that in principle it is so. But we always discover some way of escape in the idea that what held true in other time can no longer apply in the era of steam, electricity and nuclear power, with all the implications, the needs and the wants, the obligations and the tempo of life which it carries with it.

That is why a recent and if possible contemporary illustration always carries far more weight than exponents who have to be dug out from a distant and dusty past. Only a few years ago, Bapuji proved to our utter amazement that in social and political life the interplay of values and forces is quite different from what we generally imagine it to be; today Acharya Vinoba is adding further proofs. The fact that men like Amir-Abd-el-Kader in Algiers and Sri Aurobindo in India abandoned an intensely active political life to devote themselves to spiritual research and thought it much more important for the welfare of mankind cannot but make us think.

The Holy Mother whose Birth Centenary we are now celebrating is probably one of those who, through their life at least as much as by their teaching, put before us the true relations, and brushed away what our lazy and complacent mind has so carelessly endorsed.

The very person who said 'One must always work' also said 'If you have meditation, you have everything' and thus she taught that we should not let ourselves be affected by the distressing choice which seems to be constantly confronting us between the active and the contemplative life. In order to be well-directed and efficient, action must not only be imagined and planned in silent meditation, it must also be carried out in the perfect equanimity and inner silence which themselves characterize meditation. And therefore, reversely, real meditation is not running away from action, nor even a refreshing pause between active periods; it is in itself action of the most powerful kind.

Although she admitted that 'to initiate is no fun; it is a tremendous burden to bear', she would readily give initiation to

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practically anybody who asked for it, and even to some who did not. That wide-open generosity, which so few—if any—of the real great gurus ever dared assume, is the greatest proof of love that can possibly be given. She actually took upon herself the 'burden' of people whom in many cases she hardly knew, and for whose later mistakes and faults she gladly accepted to suffer. Her long and close connection with Sri Ramakrishna cannot possibly have left her in any doubt as to the 'tremendous' weight she was taking on her own shoulders when thus echoing the words of Jesus: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' The fact that—unlike Christians—she knew all souls will eventually reach liberation did not make any lighter the sacrifice which she offered to help others on their way.

The same vein was again revealed in her by another fact: she knew and said that when people touched her feet in salutation it often made 'burn', but in spite of that she would let 'all sorts of people' do it, and in all humility she even allowed disciples to 'worship' those feet, which was of course quite a different experience from the one she had gone through when her Lord and Master had celebrated a Tantric puja at those same feet, actually seeing in her the Divine Mother he was worshipping through Her Incarnation. The disciples who thus worshipped her were only struggling to get a vision similar to that with which Sri Ramakrishna was so familiar. But instead of being merely passive in her absolute purity to let the Divine Mother shine through her, as she had done with Sri Ramakrishna, in this case she had to smooth out, purify, guide and elevate the as yet groping efforts of the aspirants. And all that was unfit for the high purpose could not pass through her sieve and had to be burnt in the fire of her own *tapasya*.

That shy Indian woman who could hardly bear to lift her veil in the sole presence of her husband found all the boldness necessary to 'rebuke loudly' a man who was beating his wife. A force not her own must have then blown through her, shattering the modest demeanour which had been hers from early childhood and which had been much accentuated by the discipline to which she had submitted during the years of her married life, particularly her stays in the nahabat of the Dakshineswar gardens, and during her long and orthodox widowhood. It is wellnigh impossible for a Westerner to imagine the strict nature of the life a woman like Sri Sarada Devi lived, with the innumerable restrictions and obligations, one hundredth part of which hardly any European—still less American—woman could bear for a month. Yet that is the price which Indian women then paid—and in many cases still pay—not only for their own spiritual growth, but also for radiating spirituality all around them, both on their household and their immediate surroundings and on a much wider circle where they are never seen and where their presence is often unsuspected. A friend of mine, a very well-intentioned English general, who had made it his work over a number of years to bring British modes of life into various parts of India, once told me in a fit of discouragement:

> 'You can convince the men and make them imitate us when they are young and even when they are no longer young, although it is harder work; you can tempt the girls and women into changing their attitude on many points. But in every household you ultimately come up against one person, whom you never see or hear, and with whom you are no

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allowed even the most indirect communication, and who dashes your efforts to smithereens: the grandmother!'

And yet that stern and uncompromising keeper of spiritual values, that guardian of all that makes India a unique country in the world, did—in the case of the Holy Mother—come boldly out of her sacred retreat to right wrongs and help her sons and daughters by taking what was certainly to her a most unwomanly attitude. We cannot but be reminded of the meek Jesus when he 'overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves' in the Temple.

However one-pointed her own devotion was, she would believe in the equal value of other methods and different *Ishtas*. Elaborating what had been said so often by Sri Ramakrishna, she calmly declared: 'You should know that the sages come into the world to show the way to mankind, and each of them speaks in his own way. There are many ways, therefore all their teachings are true.' But that did not prevent her from very openly expressing definite opinions about the relative values of various techniques.

She was a great advocate of those time-honoured types of spiritual disciplines which lead the *sadhaka* safely along the road to liberation, however unacceptable they may be to the mind educated along modern theories popular in the West. She spoke both from the experience of her own successful efforts and from the results she had been able to observe at very close range on the many disciples who clustered around the Master and later around herself. And she did not worry about seeking justification which would satisfy Cartesian logics or XIXth century European physiology and psychology. She knew that what she said was true and she could afford to wait patiently until Western science discovered why.

About '*japal-siddhi*', she pronounced unequivocally and unqualifiedly: 'Realization will come through the repetition of the name.' And many of her disciples proved that she was right.

About the cult of images, which already raised so much doubt in the minds of the young generation, particularly under the iconoclastic influence of Christian missionaries, she boldly affirmed: 'stone-symbols of Siva are true. Many great sinners who visit Benares are redeemed of their sins by touching the symbol of Vishvanath. He is graciously accepting everybody's sins.' She quite naturally asked visitors to salute her image of Raghuvir, and even went so far as to suggest that they should make money-offerings to it, and she pointed out that 'from times immemorial men have been realizing spiritual freedom through image-worship.'

On the other hand, she would frequently discourage enquirers from practising forms of yoga which can only be successful under the continuous watchful guidance of a highly competent and specialized guru, when she felt that they did not possess a sufficiently strong physical, mental and moral frame to stand all the shocks and avoid all the pitfalls which are normally encountered on the way. Not only would it seem that she never advised anybody to submit to the terrible ordeal of *pan-chagni-tapas*, to which she had unflinchingly submitted herself, but about *pranayama* and *asanas*, she warningly and wisely explained: 'The practice of them brings one occult powers, and occult powers lead us astray.'

At a time when it was becoming fashionable among the educated youth to ridicule myths as desperately over-grown, she showed her high appreciation of the value of spiritual teachings embodied in mythical form by having the *Mahabharata*

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often read aloud to her. And the present-day students who are eagerly trying, both in the East and in the West, to rediscover those teachings and turn them to practical use in their own *sadhanas* must bitterly deplore the fact that apparently nobody left any written record of the interpretations she gave of those invaluable stories fraught with meaning on a variety of planes.

To mention just one more point on which her behaviour seems totally inconsistent to the modern Western mind, she certainly had the cosmic vision, and yet she 'cried bitterly' on being apprised of the death of a child. We must be content to note that such a combination of the impersonal and equal vision, with neither desire nor aversion, neither pleasure nor pain can ever affect, with the deep heart-felt sympathy for the sufferings of others can exist in fact, as was explained by Jagadguru Sri Krishna and as was so strikingly illustrated in our own times by Sri Ramakrishna and other sages of India.

I believe that the above instances are sufficient to show how a careful study of the life and teachings of the Holy Mother would make it easier for us to move away from the false oppositions I mentioned at the beginning, and to get a truer and clearer view of realities. That is only one of the many debts we owe her.

A RETROSPECTION

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA

I remember a day in 1909. Revered Sasi Maharaj—swami Ramakrishnananda—was then in Calcutta, at the house of Balaram Babu. A supreme guide of spiritual life, he told the present writer after a few words, 'And you get your initiation from the Mother. Then everything will have been attained.' In fact, they (disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) alone really understood the Holy Mother. And this is why they used to appear before her in utmost humility. Men view things of the world in the light of their own ideas. It should be no wonder then if one viewed only the familiar rickstand of greens when one had actually gone to have the ***darsan*** of Jagannath.

In 1908, while a student, I had the first darsan of the Holy Mother at Jayrambati along with three other friends. I went to Jayrambati for the second time in 1910 in the company of Revered Swami Virajananda, the previous President of the Order. He was then the President of the Mayavati Ashrama. I remember how eager the Mother was to feed her dear children with utmost care. It was during this time I heard from her the following blessed words: Sri Ramakrishna alone is the be-all and end-all of life; all cannot devote themselves with ease to spiritual practices for which one must keep a cool head; the work of the Mission is verily the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. While staying in Udbodhan for two years from the end of 1913, whenever the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, I had the good fortune to have her darsan daily. But it never occurred to me that I should ask her some questions. I was satisfied that I had been living at the feet of the Mother. I saw her for the last time in 1918 at Jayrambati. Be it at Udbodhan or elsewhere I was blessed to have been the recipient of her natural motherly affection and spontaneous grace through ever so many trifling incidents. We did not merit this; it was but her glory as the Mother of the Universe. When subsequently reading her reminiscences written by devotees, once in a while I have thought that I too should have put some such questions to the Mother. But we are relieved to learn from her own sayings that during the time of giving initiation she had already done what was necessary for the disciple. Here she stands apart from ordinary gurus.

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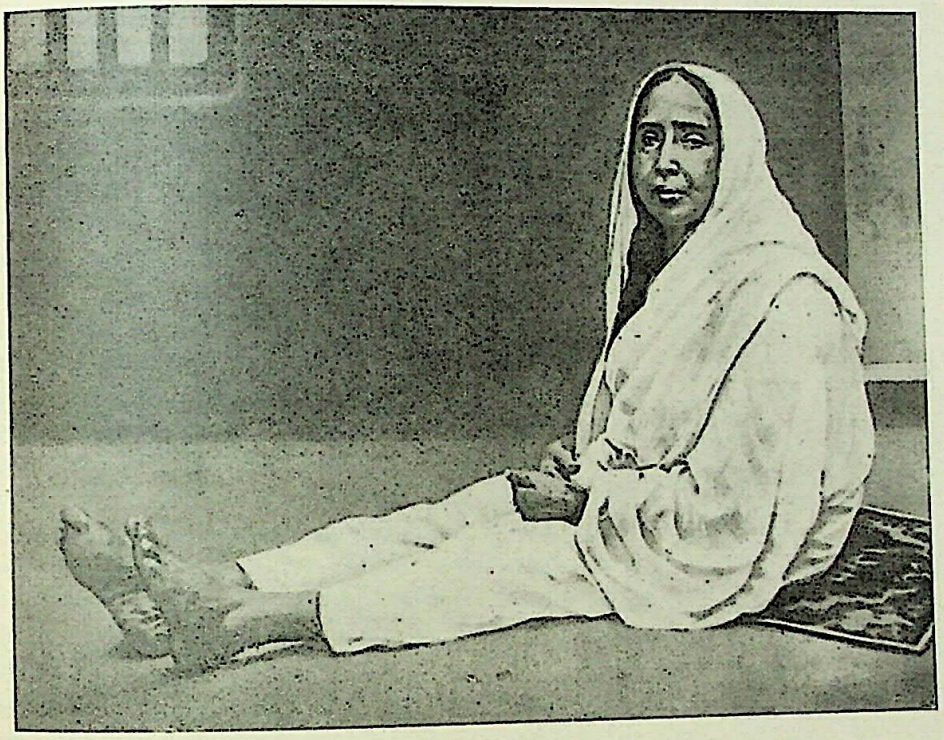
GREAT WOMEN ASSOCIATES OF THE HOLY MOTHER

Swami Tejasananda



Holy Mother at Jayrambati

It has been aptly said by a great thinker, 'Truth is the same at all points of the compass; the law of gravitation does not function more in Europe than in Africa or Asia, the facts of Chemistry are as true in an Indian as in a German laboratory, the heavens are as visible through a telescope in Tokyo as in Cambridge.'

Indeed, Truth knows no limits of land or sex, caste or creed. It reveals itself as positively in women as in men, when the moral stature of an individual is fully developed. The spiritual heritage cannot as such be the monopoly of men alone. The history of humanity all over the world records with pride the brilliant achievements not only of men but also of women who discovered, in the subtle laboratory of a disciplined life, the highest truths of spirituality and became a beneficent influence in human society. On this auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Sri Sarada Devi—the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, we recall with love and regard the lives of some great women associates of the Holy Mother, whose wealth of spiritual contributions has made them immortal in the annals of India. Like the shining lights of a chandelier, they clustered round the Master and the Mother and played a very significant role in shaping the life of the country to a considerable extent. 'Such lives,' rightly said Sister Devamata in her *Days In An Indian Monastery* 'are like a lake or a river. The sun may draw up its waters, but they fall again to refresh the earth. So these saintly ones may be lifted from our sight, but their holy influence falls back upon us to revive our failing hearts, and give us new spiritual life—new strength of purpose.'

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Yogin-Ma

The first one that attracts our attention is Yogindra Mohini Biswas familarly known as Yogin-Ma. Sri Ramakrishna used to compare her to the bud of a thousand-petalled lotus that opens slowly to the gentle touch of the solar rays and diffuses its sweet perfume all around. Yogindra Mohini was born with silver spoon in her mouth on the 16th January, 1851 at Baghbazar in North Calcutta. Her father Prasanna Kumar Mitra, was a successful professor in the Calcutta Medical College. According to the social traditions of the time, she was married at a premature age. But her marital life soon proved to be a bundle of tragedies. Her husband Ambika Charan Biswas, a handsome youth of the illustrious zamindar family of Khardah in the District of 24 Parganas turned a rake and rendered the life of the girl almost unbearable in the new domestic set-up by his moral turpitude and prodigal habits. The romantic dream of a happy married life was thus shattered to pieces, and she recoiled in disgust from the unholy association of such a husband of lascivious character. When all efforts to reclaim her husband from his blind pursuit of the downy path of dalliance failed, she had no other alternative but to bid adieu to her father-in-law's house once for all and come back to her paternal home at Baghbazar to spend the remaining days of her life with her widowed mother.

Yogin-Ma

But Yogindra Mohini's life was ordained for a nobler cause. In the midst of these adverse forces and baffling circumstances that faced her at such an early age, a new light soon glimmered from an unexpected quarter to show her the ideal that was providentially reserved for her. Sri Balaram Bose, who was her neighbour and a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, coming to know of the mental agony and distress of Yogin-Ma soon brought her into close contact with the great Master. This meeting with Sri Ramakrishna worked like a divine anodyne. His overflowing love and words of compassion and consolation not only healed up the wounds of her lacerated heart but also opened a splendid vista of golden possibilities before her. Her drooping spirit was buoyed up and the thickening clouds of despair were soon rolled back from the horizon of her life. She soon became enthused with fresh hope and courage and eventually she surrendered herself at the feet of the Master for the attainment of supreme spiritual peace.

After a few visits to Dakshineswar, Yogin-Ma became acquainted with the Holy Mother who lived at that time in the Nahabat (concert room) of the temple garden. The Holy Mother felt very much relieved to get Yogin-Ma as her confidante. From now the latter began to spend several days at a stretch with the Holy Mother from time to time. So deep was the love between the two, that they could hardly bear the separation from each other. At night the Holy Mother would drag her to her side and make her sleep with her even in that small incommodious concert room. The Holy Mother would not even allow anyone to loosen the tresses of her hair plaited by Yogin-Ma till the latter again came to braid it. The Holy Mother used to say to her women devotees afterwards, 'Yogin is my Jaya—my attendant maid, my comrade, my companion. Yogin and Golap have done so much Sadhana (spiritual practices) that it will do you good to discuss it among yourselves. She is a great Tapaswini (performer of austerities)—a Jnanin (possessor of wisdom) among women.'

Suddenly a great calamity befell them both. The Master passed away in 1886, and this

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terrible news came as a bolt from the blue to Yogin-Ma who was practising *Tapasya* at Brindavan at that time. The Holy Mother overwhelmed with grief at the demise of the Master soon joined her there. The condition of both can better be imagined than described. Says Yogin-Ma, 'The moment the Holy Mother saw me, she hugged me to her bosom and began to shed profuse tears for her separation from the Master. Both of us became so disconsolate that our days passed in lamentation and we could hardly attend to our daily needs. One day the Master appeared before us and said, "Well, why do you weep so much? Here I am. Where have I gone? It is just like passing from this room to that." These words reassured us and lessened the intensity of our grief to a considerable extent.' Here at Brindavan Yogin-Ma became at times so much buried in trance that her mind could be brought down to the normal plane with great difficulty. Referring to this mental state she said afterwards, 'My mind plunged so deep into meditation that I totally forgot the existence of the world...I could visualize the presence of my Ishta (chosen deity) everywhere.' Learning of this blessed experience of Yogin-Ma, Swami Vivekananda said to her that she would experience that ecstatic state even at the time of her death, for the memory of such a blissful experience revived at the moment of the passing away of a realized soul.

Indeed her whole life was one long chapter of unmitigated fasts and vigils, and combined in it a great poise and sweetness with a spirit of service and superb spiritual wisdom. Her practice of '*Panchatapa*' along with the Holy Mother, with flaming fires on four sides and the burning sun overhead in the garden house of Nilambar Mookherjee at Belur, her protracted austerity on the sands of Prayag, the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Allahabad, her initiation into Sannyasa (monasticism) by Swami Saradananda, her extensive pilgrimage to sacred places in India and above all, her ceaseless service to the Mother and her numerous disciples and devotees at the Calcutta residence of the Holy Mother—all combined to endue her simple and unostentatious life with a rare halo of sanctity and graceful charm.

But she was not destined to live for long on the earth. With the demise of the Holy Mother in July 1920, the last mooring of her life was removed. On the 4th June 1924, Yogin-Ma bade adieu to this mortal realm and took her eternal rest at the feet of the Divine Couple—the Master and the Mother, leaving behind the sweet aroma of her saintly personality for the good of humanity at large.

Golap-Ma

Another spiritual luminary that was intimately associated with the Holy Mother, was Golap Sundari Devi, endearingly called by the devotees as Golap-Ma. Though born in a high-caste Brahmin family in North Calcutta, and brought up in orthodox traditions, she ultimately grew up to be very liberal in her ideas. But her married life was not a happy one. She lost her husband, while she was quite young. To fill the cup of her misery, her little son was very soon snatched away by death and her only daughter Chandi who was exquisitely beautiful and had been married to the celebrated Sourindra Mohan Tagore of Pathuriaghata, Calcutta, also died at a premature age. These repeated bereavements dealt such a severe blow to her that she could not enjoy any mental peace in her domestic environments and, in utter helplessness, looked up to Providence for relief. Her prayer did not go in vain. Yogin-Ma who was her neighbour came to her rescue at this crucial hour of trouble and took her one day to Sri Ramakrishna—the saint of Dakshineswar.

Golap-Ma

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The Master quickly fathomed the depth of her sorrow and listened to her tales of suffering with supreme compassion. The panacea he applied was as unique as the magnetism of his consoling words. He told her that she was lucky in having none but the Lord to engage her attention. These bereavements, he said, were blessings in disguise, inasmuch as they opened for her a splendid avenue for a life of exclusive spiritual culture—a privilege that rarely fell to mortals. His inspiring words went deep into her heart and brought about a radical change in her mental make-up and she surrendered herself completely at the feet of the Master. From now she began to look upon the Master as her supreme object of love and worship—the only guide in weal and woe, who could wipe her tears and soothe the sores of her soul.

In no time Golap-Ma became introduced to the Holy Mother also to whom she could articulate her thoughts with the greatest relief and confidence. Oftener than not she stayed with the Holy Mother in the Nahabat. During her stay there she used to carry and serve dishes to the Master according to the directions of the Holy Mother and sat near him till he finished his meal. The Master asked the Holy Mother to take particular care of the Brahmin widow and assured her that she would follow her like a shadow throughout her whole life. The prophecy of the Master was fulfilled to the letter and spirit.

It was the month of July 1885. Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by a group of select devotees paid a visit to Golap-Ma's house. She became almost mad with joy to see the Master at her household and burst out, 'Well I cannot contain myself for joy...All my grief at the loss of Chandi is now gone.' The grief-stricken Brahmani further exclaimed, 'A porter got a lakh of rupees in a lottery by paying only one rupee for a ticket. But he died immediately to hear of this happy news, so intense was his joy! Really the man died! My condition is exactly like that. Pray, bless me all of you, otherwise I shall also die.'

Golap-Ma was plunged into an ocean of bliss. She was intently looking at the Master and the devotees, and remained pinned to the spot, being totally oblivious of her share of duties in the household. Her sister's repeated calls to assist her in the work could hardly make any impression on her. Referring to this incident, Sri M. the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* subsequently informed the Master that a similar phenomenon occurred at the time of Jesus Christ also. There were two sisters—Martha and Mary by name, who were likewise extremely devoted to Lord Jesus. On the occasion of his gracious visit to their household, Mary forgetting everything about her domestic duties sat at the feet of the Lord and heard his gospels. Martha embarrassed with heavy work said, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.' And Jesus answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, thou art troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.' Indeed Golap-Ma was as much blessed as Mary of the Bible, for both of them had chosen the 'good part' to sit at the feet of the Master and to listen to his spiritual instructions; for, how could one think of matters mundane, when the Lord Himself had stood before them in full blaze of divine glory; Sri Ramakrishna was mightily delighted to hear of such a close parallelism between the two pair of women devotees of the past and the present.

After the passing away of the Master, Golap-Ma went to Brindavan in the company of the Holy Mother and carried on hard spiritual practices there for about a year. Thereafter she visited with her many places of pilgrimage including Rameswaram in South India. The Holy Mother used to say of her, 'I cannot go to any place without Golap. I feel assured when she is with me...when Golap performs any work she does it with undivided attention, as if she were absorbed in meditation and Japa—so deep is her mental application...Golap has become illumined through Japa.' The Mother, on other occasions said to the women devotees, 'The mind of Golap is very pure. If she finds the steps to the Ganga polluted, she would find rags, clean the spot and wash it with jugfuls of water—all for the good of the public...When at Brindavan once we found the floor of the temple of Sri Madhava dirtied by

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some children. Golap, seeing the inconvenience of all visitors, at once tore a portion of her own cloth and immediately cleansed the spot therewith... Really such mental purity, the spirit of service and want of pride were the outcome of hard austerities practised in previous lives. This was indeed her last birth.'

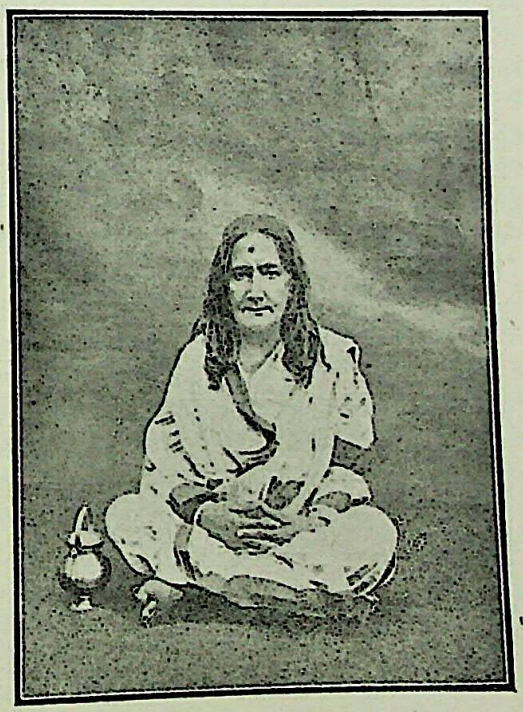
As a matter of fact, the Holy Mother became Golap-Ma's special object of care and attention. She protected the Mother from the unreasonable importunities and frenzied devotion of numerous devotees. Whether at the Belur Math or the Calcutta residence of the Mother at Baghbazar, in the houses of devotees or at Jayrambati or in the sacred places of pilgrimage—everywhere Golap-Ma was to be found a watchful attendant of the Holy Mother; for none could know so minutely the Mother's difficulties and requirements as Golap-Ma. The Mother would hold like a child the corner of Golap-Ma's cloth, while going on foot from one place to another. Golap-Ma was as it were the mistress of the Mother's large spiritual household and ministered to the needs of all with meticulous care and devotion.

Golap-Ma's life at this stage consisted uniformly of prayer and service. She lived in the Calcutta residence of the Holy Mother, where from early morning till bed-time she kept herself engaged in ministering to the Mother and her spiritual children. Golap-Ma hated waste, for, the Holy Mother deprecated it. She was exceedingly kind-hearted and charitable. She was extremely outspoken also. She would not even spare the Holy Mother, who however, put up with her criticisms, knowing that they were spoken from the heart. But the Mother, apprehensive of the unpleasant reactions of such plain-speaking on others, warned her now and then, saying that an unpalatable truth should never be told. Golap-Ma's unquestioning submission to her decision on such occasions was exemplary.

She was above all praise or blame, endearment or insult. She welcomed all such things as blessings from the Master and the Mother. She lived for four years after the passing away of the Holy Mother, and rendered loving service to all so long as she was physically fit to do it. But her health soon broke down completely under the strain of excessive labour and hard austerities, and she passed into eternal rest at the age of sixty on the 19th December, 1924. Thus ended the career of one who had the proud privilege of serving the Master and his monastic disciples for a pretty long time, and also of sitting at the sacred feet of the Holy Mother for thirty-six years—a blessing that had very rarely fallen to the lot of any of her contemporaries.

Gauri-Ma

The name of Gauri-Ma has become a household word all over Bengal. Her life is a shining



Gauri-Ma

example of how the wealth of a spiritual realization earned after years of rigorous discipline and austerities, can be utilized for the service of society. Her single-minded devotion to the cause of education for women, coupled with her high-souled effort for the spiritual training of young girls to produce Gargis and Sulabhas of ancient days have immortalized her name in the annals of the country. She was born in 1857, in a Brahmin family of Sibpur in the district of Howrah and was affectionately cal-

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led Mridani by her parents, Sri Parvati Charan Chattopadhyaya and Srimati Giribala Devi. She was bought up from childhood in the house of the maternal uncle of her Mother in South Calcutta. From her early life she showed great devotion for gods and goddesses and spent most of her time in the worship of a sacred stone emblem of Sri Krishna (named Damodar) which she received as a loving present from a spiritually gifted woman who had come from Brindavan and stayed in the family for some days. Her education in a Christian school did not proceed far, as she, for her innate aversion to exotic culture soon bade adieu to school education once for all. But her intensive study of the *Gita* and the *Chandi*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* at home kindled in her an insatiable desire for leading the ideal life of a nun. About the age of eighteen, she went on a pilgrimage to Gangasagar in the company of some of her relatives. But very soon she broke away from the party unnoticed and came to Hardwar, one of the most ancient sacred places in Northern India. She shunned from now the society of the householders and travelled from place to place to satisfy her spiritual hunger. Even the densest forests bristling with dangers and difficulties, the insurmountable snow-capped mountain heights, the deepest depths of dales and vales, and roaring rivers rushing down dreadful gorges lost all terror for her. The flora and fauna, the sights and sounds, the mystery of the Himalayan region with its tremendous appeal and its ever-shifting scenes of beauty spoke to her searching soul silent messages of profound significance and made her a pilgrim to the Temple of Eternity for ever. In the ineffable ecstasy of delight she forgot all about the fatigues of the body. Thus she visited during her protracted sojourn, such sacred places as Kedarnath and Badrinarayan, Gangotri and Jamunotri, Jwalamukhi and Amarnath, Brindavan and Dwaraka, Bhuvaneswar and Puri, to mention only a few. Thrilling experiences she gathered during these extensive tours in hills and plains form one of the most fascinating chapters of her life. They subsequently stood her in good stead, when she was called upon by the Lord to work for the benefit of humanity.

While at Puri, Gauri-Ma heard for the first time about Sri Ramakrishna from Balaram Bose of Baghbazar. Aftrer returning to Calcutta in the year 1882, she stayed with Balaram who spoke to her about the spiritual ecstasies and realizations of the Master. From now she began to feel from within a strong yearning to see the Saint of Dakshineswar. Accompanied by Balaram she very soon went to the temple garden and like a little child she narrated to him all her previous experiences and surrendered herself once for all at the feet of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was extremely glad to see Gauri and introduced her to the Holy Mother who was living at the time in the music tower. Thereafter Gauri-Ma lived from time to time in the Nahabat with the Holy Mother and devoted herself to the service of the Master and the Holy Mother.

One early morning when the purple rays of the rising sun were just peeping through the eastern horizon, Sri Ramakrishna finding Gauri-Ma engaged in culling flowers from the garden said, 'Gauri, I am pouring water, you knead the clay.' Seeing that she took it in a literal sense, he smiled and said, 'Oh, you entirely misunderstand me. The women of this country are in a sad plight. You must work for them.' Gauri-Ma was not accustomed to the idea of working in noisy crowded cities and as such did not take kindly to the suggestion. On the contrary, she expressed her willingness to train, if necessary, young girls according to the lofty ideal of the Master in the silence of the Himalayas. But the directive of Sri Ramakrishna was clear and emphatic. He averred, 'You must work in this very city for the education of women. You have had enough of spiritual practices. Now this life of penance should be applied to the service of women on whose culture and enlightenment depends the future of the country.'

This mandate of the Master was literally fulfilled in after years in the life of Gauri-Ma. From now she became one of the closest associates of the Holy Mother for some time. When, after the Master's passing, the Holy Mother being unable to bear the pangs of

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separation from the Master, went to Brindavan, she found Gauri-Ma engaged in hard spiritual austerities in a lonely cave at Raul. The Mother had so much love for Gauri-Ma that she used to say, 'Anyone who would even trim the wick of her lamp would be blessed and go to the highest heaven.'

Gauri-Ma looked upon the Holy Mother as Goddess Durga incarnate. Once Sri Ramakrishna, while talking with the Holy Mother and Gauri-Ma in his own room at Dakshineswar, jocosely asked the latter which of them (referring to himself and the Holy Mother) did she love more. Promptly did Gauri sing a Vaishnava song to signify her opinion, 'O Beauty Boy of Brindavan, how wouldst thou be reckoned superior to our beloved Sri Radha? People in distress call upon Madhusudan for relief. But when thou art in trouble, thou seekest refuge in Her and thy flute sings only the name of Rai-Kishori for help.' The meaning of the song was too apparent. The Holy Mother felt abashed at the indirect praise of her by Gauri-Ma and covered the latter's mouth with her palms. The Master was extremely delighted to hear the song and left the room with a hearty laugh. Another incident illustrates Gauri-Ma's deep-seated conviction about the Holy Mother's incarnation as Goddess Herself. Both Gauri-Ma and the Mother were once standing at the Vishnupur station. Some up-country coolies out of sheer curiosity surrounded them. Gauri-Ma pointing to the Holy Mother told them with great emotion that she was Janaki-Mai (meaning Sita-Devi) Herself. The unsophisticated coolies without a moment's hesitation began to make obeisance to the Holy Mother, looking upon her in all sincerity as the divine consort of Sri Ramachandra and shouted forth, 'Jai Sri Janaki-Mai Ki Jai' and thus received the Mother's blessings. Even the religious institution subsequently established by Gauri-Ma in Calcutta was named Saradeswari Ashrama, after the Holy Mother,—so deep was her love and regard for the Mother.

In the course of her long travels she had a first-hand knowledge of the deplorable condition of Indian women. The words of the Master now began to ring more insistently in her ears and she came to realize that to better their lot she must remove illiteracy. In the teeth of violent opposition and difficulties, Gauri-Ma carried on her work with great tenacity and ultimately succeeded in building two ideal institutions in the heart of Calcutta—one, Saradeswari Ashrama for imparting both secular and spiritual training to helpless girls and women so as to develop them into worthy citizens, and another, Matri-Sangha—to train up a band of renouncing women who would dedicate themselves to the task of women's uplift. The last forty odd years of her eventful career were devoted to the education of women in Bengal. She was in fact one of the pioneers in this field. She visualized a great future for Bengal's womanhood, and initiated ideas which gradually caught the imagination of all sections of society.

She was not merely an educationist. She was also a forceful speaker and a champion of the ancient Hindu ideals. Above all, she was a spiritual genius. Hundreds of aspirants for a higher life sought her guidance and she ungrudgingly gave them the treasures she had gathered during the long span of her life.

A few days before her final exit from the stage of this world, Gauri-Ma began to talk constantly on the Divine Mother and Sri Ramakrishna. Her mind soon left the normal plane and on the 1st March, 1938, she finally passed into beatitude. Her name is uttered even to day with deep respect not only for her splendid contribution in the field of education but also for her heroic self-sacrifice and her unceasing spiritual ministrations to numerous seekers after Truth.

Lakshmi Didi

Lakshmimani Devi comes last in this series of the great women associates of the Holy Mother. Her brief but eventful life made her one of the most adorable and inspiring figures that lived and grew to spiritual perfection in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Lakshmimani Devi was born at Kamarpukur on the 11th February 1864 in the blessed Brahmin family in which Sri Ramakrishna,

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the great prophet of the modern age, was born. Her father Rameswar Chattopadhyaya was the second son of Khudiram Chattopadhyaya, the fortunate father of the great world-teacher. From her very birth one peculiarity marked her out as a wonder-child of Nature. She used to constantly cry in her childhood. Akshay, the only son of Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother Ramkumar, could hardly put up with this incessant crying of the child. One day he surreptitiously carried the

Lakshmi Didi

child in his arms and left her alone on the village cremation ground called 'Bhutir-khal.' A consternation prevailed when, in spite of a thorough search throughout the length and breadth of the village, no trace of the child could be found. Next morning Sakambari Devi, the mother of the girl, suspecting some foul play on the part of Akshay, pressed him to disclose the whereabouts of the child, which he most reluctantly did. Sakambari and others with tears in their eyes ran in hot haste to the cremation ground only to find the girl lying on her back and playfully flinging to and fro her tiny arms and legs to the delightful surprise of all. Strangely enough, the girl did not cry for the rest of her life even for a single day after that incident.

As she grew up, she began to develop a deep respect for gods and goddesses especially for the household deities Sitala and Raghuvir. She was exceptionally intelligent and had a prodigious memory. Though her education did not go beyond the rudiments of the primary stage, she could read with ease the great epics and similar other books in Bengali. With her inborn genius she could realize the import of these sacred books. This helped her immensely in building up her spiritual life which later became a source of great inspiration to all who came into close contact with her.

She was married at the early age of twelve to Dhanakrishna Ghatak, of the village of Goghat in the District of Hooghly, but her husband who had visited Kamarpukur only for a day after the marriage, soon left his house and never returned. However, after her marriage, Lakshmimani spent only two or three years at Kamarpukur and then began to live at the age of fourteen, with the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar. A new chapter of her life was opened with her advent to that holy place. The solemn silence of the hallowed surroundings, the inspiring temples symbolizing the harmony of faiths, the sacred Bhagirathi flowing with a whimper near by and, above all, the placid presence of a God-intoxicated soul and the saintly life of the Holy Mother—all combined to speak to her unsophisticated mind something much nobler and more real than what had so long gripped her attention at home. Like a butterfly bursting forth from its cocoon wherein it had matured and sheltered during the past, her mind released from the chrysalis of worldly concerns began to wing its bold flight in the realm of the spirit and look at life from quite a different angle of vision. To her, the past with its manifold experience served as a great teacher and the future held alluring prospects of glorious possibilities. The gospels of the illumined Master and the heavenly love of the Holy Mother seeped like gentle dews into her being from day to day and she plunged, with the ardour

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of a new convert into the depths of the soul to find out the hidden treasure of life. With a lightning flash, the mission of human existence with its insistent appeal broke upon her budding spiritual consciousness and she grew restless to realize the Truth. The loving association of the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar and her austere and meditative mode of life acted as a fillip to pursue a similar ideal of intensive spiritual culture. Sri Ramakrishna, knowing her heart, lovingly initiated her into the Vaishnava mode of spiritual practice. For thirteen years, from 1872 to 1885, she lived mostly in the temple garden of Dakshineswar in the company of the Master and the Holy Mother, and one can easily envisage what a spiritual benefit she reaped during this period under the inspiring guidance of the two master minds of the age.

About her life at Dakshineswar, she herself said afterwards, 'Many a day I lived with the Holy Mother at the concert house (Nahabat)—a small room almost stuffed with articles of daily use and consumption. The Mother used to cook and I helped her in her devoted service. At that time there was a ceaseless flow of devotees during all hours of the day, and we had to prepare dishes most untimely to suit their individual tastes. Seeing our power of adjustibility, Sri Ramakrishna used to call us both Suka and Sari, birds of the same feather, and likened the Nahabat to a cage—so small and narrow was the space wherein we dwelt. But, what a joy it was to live in such a divine atmosphere and to learn from day to day all manner of work from the Mother and to drink deep of the cascade of spirituality that flowed in an incessant stream from the living gospels of the Master and the Mother.' Sri Ramakrishna's anxious solicitude for the spiritual development of the inmates of the Nahabat was without parallel. Like a vigilant angel, he used to see that they regularly carried on meditation and Japa in due time. To quote Lakshmimani's own words, 'Early in the morning, while passing by the Nahabat, the Master would call out loudly, 'O Lakshmi, get up from bed. Wake up your aunt. How long will you remain asleep? Call on the name of the Divine Mother as the time is gliding fast unnoticed.' The Holy Mother who had risen much earlier would whisper into my ears, 'He has not a wink of sleep in his eyes. It is not yet dawn. Even the birds have not begun to chirp. It is too early to rise. Keep quiet. You need not respond to his call.' The Master, getting no response from within would often pour water through the window and we had no alternative but to get up hurriedly from bed. The Holy Mother would almost burst her sides with laughter to see the fun of the Master.' Even during the fatal illness of Sri Ramakrishna, Lakshmimani was a constant companion of the Holy Mother at Shyampukur and Cossipore and served him with an unswerving spirit of devotion and complete self-abnegation.

Pilgrimage to holy places forms an integral part of the life of every spiritual aspirant in India and no training in renunciation is considered complete without a period of wandering, in homeless detachment, from shrine to shrine. After the passing away of the Master, she felt an irresistible yearning to stir out from the bounds of Dakshineswar to taste the freedom of the open road or the quiet solitude of the high hills. She soon went to Brindavan and spent a year and a half there in the company of the Holy Mother in hard spiritual practices. Thereafter she went to Puri in the company of the Holy Mother. But her spirit of wandering became so strong that she visited at different times many other important places of pilgrimage including Gangasagar, Navadwip, Triveni Sangam of Allahabad, Gaya, Benares and Hardwar. These extensive travels not only drilled into her mind a spirit of catholicity but enabled her to gather a fund of knowledge that stood her in good stead in her role as a teacher in subsequent years.

The Master had once said to the Holy Mother, 'Keep a little watch over Lakshmi. She will maintain herself, and not be a burden on any of you.' After this the Mother had no fixed abode, and Lakshmi Didi lived with her only when this was practicable; at other times she lived at Kamarpukur. Her eldest brother Ramlal, on the death of his wife in 1905, invited Lakshmi Didi to live with him at Dakshineswar, which she mostly did for nearly ten years. In October, 1922, she went to Puri and selected a plot of land which was secured from the Municipality. On it a house was constructed for her, which she occupied in February 1924 with a view to spending her last days at

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Puri. She now felt a refreshing change in the salubrious atmosphere of the land of Lord Jagannath, which with its temples and wealth of hoary spiritual traditions and the boundless ocean melting into the distant horizon, was to Lakshmimani in her old age a veritable haven of peace and joy. But time and tide tarry for none. Two more winters soon glided into the past almost unnoticed at Puri and the stage was now ready for her to bid adieu to this happy spiritual fair. Her health soon broke down under the heavy strain of spiritual ministration and she fell seriously ill. During this period she had frequent trances and wonderful visions to presage as it were her final plunge into the Unknown. At last, on Wednesday the 24th February, 1926, she laid her tired limbs down at the lotus-feet of the Lord for eternal rest and passed into Mahasamadhi at the age of sixty-two.

How versatile was her genius and what a perennial source of merriment was she to the Holy Mother and the great women devotees of the Master has been beautifully depicted by Sister Nivedita in the *Master As I Saw Him* as follows:

> 'Amongst the ladies who lived more or less continuously in the household of Sarada Devi at this time (November, 1898) were Gopal's Mother, Yogin-Mother, Rose-Mother, Sister Lucky and a number of others. These were all widows,—the first and the last child-widows—and they had all been personal disciples of Sri Ramakrishna when he lived in the temple garden at Dakshineswar. Sister Lucky, or Lakshmi Pidi, as is the Indian form of her name, was indeed a niece of his, and is still a teacher and director, and is a most gifted and delightful companion. Sometimes she will repeat page after page of some sacred dialogue, out of one of the Yatras, or religious operas or again she will make the quiet room ring with gentle merriment, as she poses the different members of the party in groups for religious tableaus. Now it is Kali, and again Saraswati, another time it will be Jagaddhatri, or yet again, perhaps, Krishna under the Kadamba tree, that she will arrange, with picturesque effect and scant dramatic material.'

WONDERFUL DEVOTEES OF THE WONDERFUL MOTHER

Koalpara is a small village on way from Vishnupur to Jayrambati, the sacred birth place of the Holy Mother. On way to and from Calcutta the Mother used to halt at that place where humble devotees were ever anxious to serve her. Gradually an Ashrama grew up there. The Holy Mother herself installed the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and her own in this Ashrama. Some houses were built as a separate wing specially for the Mother's stay and named 'Jagadamba Ashrama'.

On a fixed day of the month Sravana, the Mother was to come from Jayrambati to sanctify the place by her stay there for a few days and thus bless the devotees. On the appointed day it began raining incessantly since morning. The inmates of the Ashrama began to cogitate as to if it would be proper for them to go to fetch the Mother in this terrible weather. Finally they resolved that at least for keeping their word they had to go. It would be then Mother's sweet will to come or not. It was late in the evening when devotees could with much difficulty reach the Mother's place with a palanquin for being used as her conveyance.

'You monkeys', howled Kali-mama (younger brother of the Holy Mother), 'you have become my sister's worthy devotees! Your leader, (Kedar) to be sure, is gifted with a weaver's intelligence. What a superb service Jogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) did to my Sister; with what caution Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) does every bit of his service to her. How great is their devotion! And you senseless people have come to take my sister in this rain and storm.'

The Holy Mother was listening to this harangue and smiling all the while looking on the devotees. A bit emboldened by this attitude of the Mother one of the devotees from Koalpara said, 'What power have we got that we should be able to take Mother with us or serve her? The appointment was fixed previously that on this day we should come here with a palanquin for the Mother. And we have come.'

'Ah! my children, you can keep your word, and imagine I cannot keep mine,' said the Mother laughing. 'Come along, I shall go with you now itself. Radhu and others will come later on.'

'How is that possible Mother!' said the defeated devotees of Koalpara. 'None can stir out in this horrible weather. And have we to take you there drenching you all the way and ultimately make you fall ill?'

This was great enough a hit even for Kali-mama to laugh out. The empty palanquin went back in the darkness of the foul night.

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SUPREME PATTERN OF INDIA'S IDEAL OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER—SRI SARADA DEVI

Bhikshu Anand Isabodh

Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son,
Lowly, lofty, more than all creatures,
Fixed target of Eternal designs.

You are the one who ennobled human nature
To such sublime heights that your Creator
Was not ashamed to become your creature.

DANTE ALIGHIERI, PARADISO XXXIII (1 - 6)

So sang Dante contemplating the glory of the Madonna, the *Theotekos* or the Virgin Mother of God in Christianity. Thus begins the lyric of Catholic Christianity to the dignity of the Virgin Mother of God. This is one of the well-known Dentesque hymns in praise of the virginity and maternity of Mary, Mother of God-man, the Madonna of Catholicism.

Among so many parellels between Catholicism and Hinduism one of the most striking and soul-uplifting doctrine is that of celibacy, chastity, virginity, reaching its climax in the ideal of Virgin Motherhood. Both Catholicism and Hinduism, from times immemorial, have held that only the pure in heart can see God, that religious purity is essential for Self-realization, and that the higher one climbs on the ladder of *Brahmacharya*, the nearer one reaches God. St. Augustine speaks of 'Christianity before Christ', because the eternal truths of Christianity have no beginning and no end, coalescing to the Religion of Man, the *Sanatana Dharma* of history. It is Catholic Christianity and Sanatana Hinduism that have held out the loftiest ideal of Virgin Mother before mankind.

Just as the Buddhist, Jain and modernistic rebellions did not shake the rock-bottom of the Hindu culture, so the Protestant earthquake of the sixteenth century, and various individualistic rational schools in still recent times, did certainly divide Christendom, but never shook the sheet-anchor of Catholic Christianity. The survival through transformation which we observe in both Hinduism and Catholicism is due to the fact that both have their tap-roots in God, Reality, Truth, in those eternal imponderables, those spiritual values which are as permanent as the suns and moons and stars, as unshakable as the bottom of the Himalayas, and as pure as the white snows of Everest.

If Catholic Christianity can point out to Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ and Christianity, then Hinduism of the twentieth century can point out to Sri Sarada Devi as the supreme pattern of India's ideal of the Virgin Mother. There are points of contact, as also differences between two patterns, mostly derived from the historical and cultural background of the Catholic and Hindu civilizations.

II

No bigger lie had been invented and propagated by foreign apologists and their bought acolytes in India than the

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assertion that India is the land where her womenfolk remain enslaved for ever. The lurid pictures of Indian womanhood painted by Catherine Mayo fade into insignificance when one reads between the lines of books, pamphlets and articles of those propagandists who try to extol Western civilization at the expense of the Oriental culture, Indian civilization and Hindu religion. Child-marriage, forbidden widow-remarriage, caste barriers, ignorant priest-craft and popular pornographic orgies and other items are quoted to sustain their thesis that Indian womenfolk is enslaved for ever.

Manu's saying:

पिता रक्षति कौमारे भर्ता रक्षति यौवने।
रक्षन्ति स्थाविरे पुत्रा न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति ॥

Manu Smriti IX. 2-3

The father protects the woman in her childhood, husband in her youth and sons in her old age. Woman is not worthy of freedom.

This saying has been construed as to mean that Indian women are dependent and enslaved from cradle to grave by menfolk. They deduce that woman, from her birth, is ear-marked for the satisfactions of the lusts of men, to serve him in the bedroom and the kitchen, with no independence, initiative, originality, creativity and self-expression. This picture was painted and sold in many parts of the world. During India's political bondage such news were sold out on a mere demand-and-supply basis. But commercialized lie cannot destroy truth. Truth alone wins: 'सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्'—Truth alone triumphs—not untruth.

Mundaka Up. III 1. 6.

The naked truth is that no country has ever conceived a higher ideal and loftier picture of womanhood as the seers and architects of the Indian civilization had done. While ancient Greece, at the zenith of her cultural expansion, idealized virgin womanhood in her concept of *Sophia*, *Liana* and *Parthenon*, it was reserved for India to give a philosophic basis to the supreme idealization of womanhood. A new school of thought was developed to reach the summits of idealization of womanhood in Nature and Society. Saktism, Saiva Siddhanta, Sankhya, Yoga and even Dvaita Vedanta have all much light to throw upon the feminine principle of life. Woman was not merely the other half of man, a helpmate fashioned by God from the ribs of Adam, an Eve that is the mother of Humanity. She was the very Goddess, *Devi*. She is Nature, *Prakriti*. She is the whole relative universe, the *Maya*. Woman is the eternal *She* of both Nature and Cosmos, the active and dynamic principle which actually creates, preserves and destroys. She is the Sakti of the Siva, the cosmic force which actualizes potentialities, educes creatures from potentiality to existences, that gives the link and urge for creatures to move towards the Creator. In India besides the philosophy, a world of art and literature grew around the ideal womanhood. Not Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*, but the very *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the frescoes of Ajanta and Ellora, statues of Prajna-paramita, Saraswati, Siva-Parvati, Radha-Krishna, Satyavan-Savitri etc., are all illustrative of this loftiest Indian ideal of womanhood.

There is a lyrical music that runs through the story of Maitreyi, Gargi, Draupadi, Sita, Ambapali, Isidasi, Mira and a hundred other names from Indian history, all great women, unique in their own fields, stalwart patterns expressing and substantiating one or other aspect of the Indian ideal of womanhood. As a matter of fact, the higher the spiritual development, the less there is left to dis-

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tinguish feminine sex in them. As Swami Vivekananda says: 'There is no sex in souls'. Spiritual perfection, ethical vigour and creative achievements are to be detected in the realm of soul, far beyond the biology of sex and psychology of man-woman differentiations. A Lakshmibai of Jhansi or a Joan of Arc in France was more than the best soldiers in any country, irrespective of their feminine sex. Gargi and Maitreyi were best philosophers on par with Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Plato or Sankara.

Behind the obvious scenes of social degradation based on which Vivekananda wrote to Sister Nivedita: 'India cannot yet produce great women; she must borrow them from other nations'—the thread that has been running throughout the chequered history of India is still visible, the thread that built up a civilization second to none in world history, a civilization that raised woman to the status of *Devi* or Goddess, a mother to *grihalakshmi*, and womanhood to *Sakti* and *Saraswati*, to creative force and trancendent wisdom. The Mother cult, as it was developed in India, far beyond the concept of Mother Earth and Mother Goddess, has hardly any parellel elsewhere. Even the myth of Iris and Osiris in Egypt, Demeter and Dyonysius in the Eleusian mysteries of Greece, pictures of Athene, Parthenon and Penelope are but faint images of the philosophy of Sakti and Saiva Siddhanta of India.

True, there had been, still there are, too many abuses and social pitfalls in India. But the ideal of woman in Indian society still stands—woman free to the core, free in their spinstership, marriage, family life and free in profession and avocation in life. Against the practice of arranged marriage of girls stand out the ideal of *Svayamvara*, free choice of the life-partner which is India's true ideal. Arjuna's feat to win Draupadi is well-known. Durga, while still a virgin girl to those *Asuras* who aspired to marry her, proudly said: 'He who conquers me in battle, he who humbles my pride, who is my equal in this world, he shall be my husband'. That is the pattern of Indian womanhood. That is her pride, her dignity, her freedom.

Marriage, sacrosanct in itself, was never the only course left for Indian women. The path of renunciation and lifelong chastity was open to her. She could devote her whole lifetime to study and service. That is the ideal of Sannyasini in Hinduism and Bhikkhuni in Buddhism, of which the best traditions, outside the Hindu-Buddhist world, is to be found only in Catholic Christianity. Christian monasticism for both monks and nuns had been once greatly influenced by the Essenes and Theurapeutae in Palestine, the Pythagoreans and Neo-Platonists in Greece and the Hindu-Buddhist monastic institutions of Asia.

Through virginity and lifelong dedicated service of God and man, women became teachers, guides, inspirers and spiritual mothers of mankind. Biological sex, when sublimated from physical procreation to psycho-spiritual sublimation, becomes the main force for creativity and dynamic service of the society. Householders beget physical children; but nuns are the spiritual mothers of mankind.

Nature's role of a woman is always motherhood. Where there is no procreation, there is creation. Lifelong virgins are the progenitors of spiritual humanity. Like monks, they transcend their sex and reach perfection through sex-sublimation. They live on this earth only to bestow graces and benefits to suffering mankind. That is the ideal of Sannyasis and Sannya-

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sinis, of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. Motherhood, in either case is the highest ideal in Indian traditions. Says Manu:

> 'One teacher alone excels ten sub-teachers in glory; a father excels a hundred teachers in glory; but a mother excels even a thousand fathers in glory'. (II. 145).

III

Sri Sarada Devi is the twentieth century ideal of such a pattern of a Virgin Mother. She is different from ordinary nuns and sannyasinis because legally Sri Sarada Devi was married to Sri Ramakrishna. According to the social conventions Sarada Devi was the wife of Sri Ramakrishna. Yet, esoterically and psycho-spiritually they were never husband and wife, but their relations were that of Purusha and Prakriti, a son and a mother, a father and a daughter, a brother and a sister, a teacher and a disciple.

It is here the worldly eyes fail to penetrate the mystery of sublimated chastity. The world knows of but one relation between man and woman, husband and wife. They relegate ideal Brahmacharya and 'Platonic Love' and Divine Love to the cold storage of poetic imagination. The world does not believe any more in the possibility of a husband and wife living together in the prime of their youth without carnality, pollution and violation of Brahmacharya. Yet facts are beyond popular ravings.

In the West romantic lyrics about women are best sung when she is conceived as the beloved and sweetheart of a lover. This aspect of feminine beauty and love is what most often one comes across in romantic literature, which from the West is today flooding the cinema markets of most Asian countries, including India. But woman is more beautiful and lovable when she is conceived as a mother, as a daughter, as a nun, above all as a virgin mother of culture, virgin missionary of human values and herald of refined civilization. Poetry that springs when woman is idealized as mother, sister, daughter, nun, virgin, virgin mother and heroine is of much loftier character than when she is adored as passionate sweetheart and ravishing beauty.

Sri Sarada Devi, then, stands out unique because she is the virgin nun of religious perfection, spiritual daughter of Sri Ramakrishna, virgin mother of the entire Ramakrishna order of monks, virgin sister to all devotees of God, a herald and missionary of the twentieth century culture of Hindu India. She is not the last in the line of the great woman saints and heroines of India; she is just the twentieth century link of a culture and civilization which fades back to prehistoric fog, and which is now destined to survive into limitless future.

If according to Romain Rolland Ramakrishna was 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people', then Sri Sarada Devi is the supreme pattern of the Virgin Mother, an ideal for both virgin nuns and household mothers of modern India, both ideals of virginity and motherhood so gracefully blended in that remarkable rural saint, the worthy consort of mystic Ramakrishna.

The Life of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, is both a mystical lyric and an esoteric enigma to the world, as certainly it was the God-intoxicated life of Sri Ramakrishna. What had Jayrambati hamlet in Bankura district of Bengal to attract any modern man? When the Jews heard that Jesus was born and brought up in the lowly village of Nazareth, they asked: 'What good can come out of Nazareth?'

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It is from Jayrambati, one of the most illiterate and forgotten villages of Bengal that Sarada Devi comes. She was not proficient in learning, not even in the three R's, except in reading. Born amidst the poorest, she had affinity with the under dogs and outcasts of the Indian society. It is from the humblest surroundings that we see Sarada Devi emerging out and becoming the most conspicuous saint of the twentieth century India. As St. Paul says:

> 'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty'. Cor. 1.27

That is the eternal paradox of spiritual life when confronted with the vanity fair of worldly glamour and perishable riches. The last strings that tie man to the wheel of *samsara* must be cut, before he could realize his potential powers and reach the perfection already sown in him. It is this paradox of worldly lowliness and divine elevation, of the poverty of material wealth and richness of spiritual treasures, almost an illiterate from academic point of view, but reaching the summits of God's wisdom, that is the paradox which we see in the life and works and teachings of Mother Sarada Devi, as it certainly was in the life of her spiritual guru, Sri Ramakrishna.

Poor Sarada, married at the age of six to the 'mad' temple priest of Dakshineswar, had to suffer humiliations and contumelies from every side. The women of her village used to belittle Sarada by saying: 'Here comes Syama's daughter, who has been married to a lunatic'. But who becomes 'lunatic' for God! 'Torrents of tears people shed for wealth and worldly goods. But none weeps for God', said Sri Ramakrishna. So the fashionable woman and glamourous youth never understand what it means to become mad for God, passionately restless for the vision and realization of God.

Sarada Devi, considered whether as the helpmate of Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar during his lifetime, or as a vehicle and herald of his gospel, or as the inspiring and protecting Mother of the Ramakrishna Order of monks, or as an ideal pattern for the women of spiritual India, is both an epitome of India's best womanly virtues, and a mirror in which the ideal of Virgin Mother reflects so transparently. Those most interesting anecdotes and detailed descriptions of the doings and sayings of this remarkable saint, preserved in the traditions of the Ramakrishna Order are there to enhance all the more the ideal of the Virgin Mother as materialized in the life of Sarada Devi. I think the idealization of Sarada Devi as the very image of the Divine Mother was the main motive that prompted Ramakrishna to offer worship to her during her lifetime. In that symbolic worship, Ramakrishna recognized in Sarada all the *Devi* and *Kumari* and *Mata* aspects of the Divine Mother. Certainly she proved to be a visible image of the invisible Divine Mother, a virgin or kumari throughout her life, and a Mata or Mother that gave birth to Ramakrishna Order through the love and grace of Sri Ramakrishna, the representative image of *Bharat Mata*. 'The Father who is in Heaven' of Christians is the same as the 'Divine Mother of the Universe' as conceived by the Hindus.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna on 16th August, 1886, it fell to the happy lot of Sarada Devi to become the true Mother of the spiritual orphans of the new monastic Order, initiated by Ramakrishna and organized by Swami

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Vivekananda. Whether in the village of Kamarpukur or in the midst of her disciples of Calcutta, this admirable Virgin Mother took upon herself vicarious sufferings for the expiation of the sins and faults of her spiritual children.

Once the Holy Mother was bed-ridden during her last illness. She would even then welcome her spiritual children and try to console and strengthen them, even when she was reduced to skeleton and ailing with age and disease. She felt her maternal duty to suffer vicariously for all those who were initiated by her to religion, or were within the inner or even outer circle of Sri Ramakrishna. While Sri Sarada Devi was lying in her sick-bed, once a monastic member whispered into the ears of one of his brothers saying: 'If the Mother recovers this time, we shall not allow her to give initiation any more. She is suffering so much because of taking upon herself the sins of all sorts of people'. Sarada Devi, overhearing this conversation, said to her spiritual children, with a sort of smile symbolic of maternal reproof, 'What are you saying? Do you think that Sri Ramakrishna came only to take sweets?' Should not a mother suffer for her children? Are not sufferings of equal joy to the mother as her joys for her children?

It is no mere chance that the foundation of the historic Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission was to be blessed by Sri Sarada Devi, the Virgin Mother of the Order, in November 1898. Her spiritual ministry was not restricted to her inner circle alone. Her itinerant preaching and missionary journeys to Madras, Bangalore, Orissa, three visits to Benares and other parts of India had served the great purpose of spreading the flower of India's spiritual renaissance wherever she went.

Being a virgin for life, her maternal instincts befriended all, in a special way the sinners, the downtrodden and the lost. Once a disciple told Sarada Devi not to admit to her presence a certain impure young man. The Holy Mother replied: 'If my child gets covered with mud and dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?' Compare this to the parable of Buddha in which a mother is said to risk her own life for the safety and life of her only son. Jesus says: 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners unto repentance'. Magdalenes and publicans, prostitutes and prodigal children are the special objects of God's predilection and love. That is the mystery of God's redeeming love.

IV

Paramahamsas belong to a category of their own. They are not bound by even the conventional laws of monasticism in dress and external behaviour. Both Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi belonged to this category. They were not strictly and technically speaking a monk and a nun; but the father and mother of a monastic order. They set a perfect pattern for the loyal children of India showing the path whereby a son and a daughter of Mother India could grow to, if only they are steadfast in the needed discipline, study, meditation, social service and above all renunciation of *kama-kanchana* or sex and gold.

Sri Sarada Devi left this world on 20th July, 1920. But her spiritual progeny survives. Her great family, born of her virgin womb, is growing, spreading the message of Neo-Hinduism in countries far and near. The children of this Virgin Mother have traversed this earth of the five continents and the seven seas studying and preaching the eternal truths of religion, crystallized in scriptures and

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embodied in the lives of prophets and saints. The same universality which Ramakrishna taught in religion was expounded by Sri Sarada Devi. Early in July 1920, a few days prior to the passing away of the Holy Mother, one of her spiritual daughters sobbed bitterly at the thought that Sarada Devi was about to leave them. Then the Holy Mother said:

> Why do you fear? Have you not seen the Master?...If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this entire world is your own!

This world-wide catholicity, this inexhaustible tolerance towards the erring and the sinful world, this humanistic touch and divine love are among the features that mark out Sri Sarada Devi from among other woman-saints of India. Her unique position in hagiographic literature is in the harmonious synthesis she achieved in her monastic perfection from within secular garb, her virginal maternity which gave birth to many a son and daughter throughout the length and breadth of India, and even many admirers and disciples abroad. To both monastic nuns and housewives Sri Sarada Devi is a shining pattern, at once both a virgin nun and a perfect spiritual mother of many children.

In this age of proletarian revolution throughout the globe, the lowly, rustic, hard-working, poor and natural surroundings in which the Holy Mother was born and grew up gain a new significance. *Aparigraha* or non-possession was as much part of the monastic trait of the Holy Mother as Brahmacharya. Unlike the Jain, Buddhist or even Hindu sannyasinis, Sarada Devi had no need to cut off her long hair or to wear saffron robes, as her monastic children of the Order. But in the practice of what Patanjali calls *yama* she was uncompromisingly stern.

That is the esoteric of the power and wisdom of the Holy Mother. No religion has stressed so much on the psychological and ethical essentials of Self-realization as Hinduism and Buddhism. It is for this reason that in the natural order and within the orbit of rational religion, both Hinduism and Buddhism have produced giants in sanctity and wisdom hardly found in the non-Aryan religions of the world.

Post-independent India is still anaemic and sickly because she has lost hold of the rock whence was hewn out the temple of Indian culture. Our aping of foreign customs have made us lose our national self-respect, and pride in what is perennial in our cultural heritage. India cannot be revived save on the bed-rock of her own essential culture. Any other culture, whether Islam, Christianity or modern science, can only thrive when grafted on to the tap root of Indian culture. For this wider universality and deeper realization the message and mission of a prophet like Sri Ramakrishna and a Virgin Mother like Sri Sarada Devi is a pointer, a beacon light and an impregnable fortress for Free India.

'If Sri Ramakrishna had not come, if he had not dowered us with his infinite grace, who would have the power to snap the ties of Maya? He practised hard austerities in his own life and gave the fruits thereof towards the liquidation of the binding results of Karma done by jivas. Don't you see, he is making those very trees, which should have borne flowers and fruits after many years, bear the same overnight? What an intense suffering he underwent by accepting the sins of jivas on himself! You would have understood this, had you seen him suffering from cancer in the throat. But, for the good of the people he won't stop talking; rather he would be sorry if none came.'

Holy Mother

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LESSONS FROM HOLY MOTHER'S LIFE

Brahmachari Yogatmachaitanya

Holy Mother is like the ocean. To her each of us comes, and into her each dives, according to his skill and strength, for treasures of the spirit. But the ocean is infinite. No one could ever describe—much less make his own—a fraction of the treasures hidden there. At the time of celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Holy Mother's birth, we may profitably contemplate such of those treasures as our limited understandings have been able to grasp. Let us consider here three lessons gleaned from a study of her life.

The first lesson is concerned with the usefulness of self-analysis in the spiritual life. Though it is obvious that Holy Mother was fully aware of the important place that this virtue occupies, it is easier to draw conclusions about her attitude toward it by observing her method of teaching than by inquiring into her actual practice. That she practised self-analysis even as a girl is clear from her account of having prayed to God for purity of character while still at Jayrambati; and that she did so as a young woman is shown by the fact that she prayed to be delivered from finding fault with others shortly after the death of Sri Ramakrishna. It would be foolhardy to speculate, however, about what Holy Mother's self-analysis implies or what was the method she employed. She whose sadhana was performed wholly for the sake of others, and who spent her adult life providing a perfect example to the world of how a woman should approach her everyday duties as a child of God, can hardly be said to have been in need of self-analysis in any sense we can conceive of. But from the nature of her teaching one can draw certain conclusions about how she regarded this virtue and also about how one can put it into practice.

Like every teacher with the 'badge of authority' from God, Holy Mother was realistic. She did not attempt the impossible by going against nature. She recognized the fact that spiritual seekers are not all equally endowed or even capable of equal development. Whatever she said to those who sought her advice flowed from a complete understanding of the individual seeker. To each she spoke directly and convincingly, suiting her words to the capacity of the hearer. To a monk who questioned her about the efficacy of pranayama and āsana, she once said: 'The practice of these brings one occult powers and occult powers lead one astray.' But to another, in answer to his question as to whether he should continue the practice of pranayama which he had begun some time before, she could say: 'Yes, you may practise a little, but not too much, for it may heat the brain. But if the mind becomes calm of itself, what is the use of pranayama?' Again, to one of her devotees she declared, when asked about whether to count when performing japa: 'No, do it without counting, for counting often diverts the attention from the japa.' But to another she said: 'One must repeat the mantra at least fifteen to twenty thousand times a day. Only then will one get some results.' What might at first sight seem to be contradictions in Holy Mother's teaching are to be explained simply by her ingrained habit of suiting the words to the hearer. Never did she speak in rou-

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tine fashion. To her simple women devotees she spoke simple, homely truths. To her monastic disciples she could give authoritative instruction on abstruse points of Vedanta. Despite the great variety in her teaching, however she never deviated from the fundamental principles of the Sanatana Dharma as illustrated in the life and character of Sri Ramakrishna. She had become the expert dancer who never makes a false step.

In Holy Mother's recorded conversations are to be found, of course, many general teachings that are universally applicable. Without such a body of doctrine her disciples would not have been provided with a tangible ideal. But it is with the very many other teachings, having an individual and practical application—instructions about disciplines for realizing that ideal—that we are concerned here. It is they that provide us with a clue to the usefulness of self-criticism. Through these teachings we understand that if Holy Mother recognized differences in development among her disciples and taught them accordingly, she would expect those who wish to mould their lives according to her, and who consequently read her conversations in their entirety, to find out just where they themselves stand and what their limitations are before trying to put into practice any of her practical advice.

If, before reading her conversations, a seeker has received instruction from a spiritual teacher who accepts her ideal, the problem is made simpler; for the teacher will have explained to him the nature and extent of the disciplines he should follow. But there are many seekers who, for one reason or another, have not found a teacher. And it is such persons that are most likely to read books of spiritual instructions indiscriminately. Again, even if one has a teacher, one cannot ask his advice from day to day about the proper way to conduct oneself; indeed, one should not do so in any case, for too much dependence on the guidance of another, especially in matters where individual judgment is entirely possible and proper, tends to weaken one's self-reliance. The seeker who is in earnest, therefore, will strive to become as objective about himself as possible. Whenever he is in doubt about his proper course, will try to differentiate between the natural inertia that discourages every beginner from making his best effort, and the misguided ambition that would force him to attempt more than his present strength will permit. If at any time he feels he is deluding himself about his capacity or about the nature of his duty, he will pray to God for enlightenment. Once he has formed an accurate estimate of himself, however, he will find it easier to decide what to adopt and what to reject. He will, in his reading, remember to notice *to whom* an instruction was spoken as well as what it conveys, and he will automatically disregard those details that do not apply to him. He will not allow himself to imitate a great soul or follow a discipline intended for a more advanced seeker. Not expecting too much of himself or making too many allowances for his weaknesses, yet he will neither grow frustrated nor disillusioned nor complacent.

It should not be forgotten that while properly estimating his own limitations, a seeker should always strive to increase his present capacity for spiritual discipline. Holy Mother, like every true teacher, required of those who would make God the centre of their lives a stern exercise of will whenever the occasion demanded. But common sense dictates that such an effort should be held within certain limits; and these limits can best be determined after

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one has thoroughly understood where one stands. To force oneself beyond one's capacity is to assume an unnatural attitude whereas spiritual practice ought to be essentially spontaneous. It is not even advisable to strain to achieve power of self-analysis. When, through God's grace a natural and healthy spiritual life has begun to develop in a man he automatically manifests this virtue.

The second lesson we shall consider here is at once easier to learn from a study of Holy Mother's life, and harder to put into practice in one's own. This lesson is concerned with modesty and self-effacement as indication of spiritual progress. Never, perhaps, in the history of religion has there been a life so consistently illumined under such varied conditions by these two virtues as Holy Mother's. Certain nuns sheltered from the world may have achieved a high degree of humility within their narrow sphere. But to have been obliged to lead the life of daughter, wife, nun, mother, and teacher, and yet to have maintained the same supreme degree of self-effacement throughout, is a phenomenon of a completely different order, which can only have been the result of total self-forgetfulness and total absorption in God. Holy Mother conducted her life according to the direction of Sri Ramakrishna without wishing to know what others thought of her in any way calling herself to their notice. Her early training at home no doubt, contributed to the perfection of modesty in her. But social custom is not enough to explain the fortitude and self-sufficiency that enabled her to live at Dakshineswar, for years at a time, in the most uncongenial surroundings, unnoticed by all but one or two of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and those of his women devotees who from time to time came to see him. Nor can it explain how she could serve her teacher and husband, during the long months of his fatal illness, in even more lonely and cramped circumstances; or settle, after his death, at her husband's parental home in Kamarpukur, in utter isolation, relying totally on God; or finally devote half her time, every year, to the welfare of a demanding and inconsiderate family at Jayrambati, when she could have been enjoying the company of loving and solicitous devotees in Calcutta. Such perfection of self-effacement can only have been the result of a supreme spiritual maturity.

Impossible as it would be to emulate her example, we are yet reminded, in contemplating this aspect of Holy Mother's life, that each spiritual seeker, according to his capacity, exhibits a similar modesty and self-effacement as he progresses. Indeed, by the extent to which he manifests this quality can be judged the extent to which he is progressing toward his goal. For if, through candid self-analysis, a seeker has come to understand the degree of his spiritual development (which, in the majority of instances will be found to be a very low degree), he becomes automatically humble enough to wish not to appear other than he is. He grows indifferent to the acclaim or the censure of the world. Without false pride, yet without false modesty, he goes his way.

But again, the earnest seeker will not fall into the error of thinking that he must force himself to practise modesty and self-effacement. Even to a greater degree than is true of self-analysis, the modesty of a holy person is something that springs from the very nature of his quest. To force oneself to become 'self-effacing' is to practise false modesty; it has precisely the opposite effect to that desired, namely, the violent inward asserting of the self, covered only by a thin cloak of hypocritical

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meekness. In times of stress, however, by asking oneself how truly self-forgetful one has been in the performance of one's duties, he can discover the deficiency in his aspiration for the ideal and set about remedying it.

Though, by observing Holy Mother's life, one may remind oneself of the need of self-analysis for spiritual growth, and of the expression of that growth in the form of an increasing manifestation of self-effacement, neither of these virtues can flourish without a third, which shines pre-eminently in Holy Mother's character. It is this that we shall now consider as our third lesson to be drawn from a study of her life.

What is it that in the first place prompts a man to take up the religious quest? Surely it is nothing if not what is commonly known as 'love of God'—the yearning for the ideal of ideals. The phrase 'love of God' has, however, been repeated so often in religious literature, and been so often confused with mere sentimental emotionalism, that for most people the words have lost their meaning. If we want to know what love of God really means, we shall find the answer in Holy Mother. From her we learn that real love is not something spectacular or passionate, but rather a calm, unswerving, and profound direction of the whole soul toward that which, as the result of discrimination, the seeker has understood to be the one thing enduringly real in the human experience. What we call in a saintly person, 'love of God' is simply the expression of his constant remembrance of that one thing that is enduringly real.

Love of God is vividly present in every stage of Holy Mother's life. When she was still with her parents as an unmarried girl, she was already in the habit of praying to God with great fervour; after her marriage to Sri Ramakrishna, that yearning for God increased a thousandfold until, when she was impelled to seek out her husband at Dakshineswar at the age of eighteen, it had risen to such an intensity that she was uniquely fitted to become the first disciple of the greatest of religious teachers: and after the Master's death, that love, now perfectly mature, poured itself forth in an unceasing torrent not only to the thousands of monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, but to all mankind, nay, to all living things, whom she now regarded as her children. That love, which could endure without a murmur the continuous criticism of neighbours during her years of isolation in Jayrambati after marriage, which could suffer every conceivable inconvenience at Dakshineswar and yet remain as steadfast as ever; that could endure the absolute privation and the disapproval of her neighbours at Kamarpukur after the Master's death, and, having attained its consummation, could lavish itself upon the Moslem workman Azed in Jayrambati in the same degree that it lavished itself on her son Sarat in the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta—where can the like of that love be found? In Holy Mother, love of God had, indeed, become transmuted into God's love.

Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that the discipline of love is a 'real genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love. The advantage of bhakti is that the beginning is one with the end. Even the slightest impulse of love directed toward God is not, in essence, different from the purified love of a perfected soul. We need not become discouraged, therefore, in contemplating the fullness of Holy Mother's love of God. In each of us is planted the seed of that aspiration toward the Highest which must one day blossom into perfect love. Only as we nourish that seed in us through

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prayer and unselfish service can we hope for progress in spiritual life. It is love that guards us against all possible misconceptions about the degree of our advancement, bringing real humility and making bearable the irksome routine inevitable in everyday religious life. It is love that gives a sense of balance even to one who expects too much of oneself and would prefer always to fly higher than one is able. It is love, in the guise of prayer, that transmutes the will that is too impetuous into a dynamo of controlled power, and the will that is too lax into a source of heroic strength. And it is love, finally, that effaces the self in moments of wonder and adoration, when for a brief moment the veil is lifted and we see in some measure the reality of God's immanence and transcendence. Inspired by love of a Great One like Holy Mother, and blessed in turn by her own life-renewing love, no soul that lives need feel he is without hope.

THE SAVING TOUCH

SWAMI ATMAPRAKASHANANDA

As far as I remember I joined the Order in 1912 at Udbodhan after renouncing home once for all. After I had stayed for a few months, one day, seated in the shrine the Mother graciously initiated me into spiritual life. As we had some connection with the revolutionary parties of that time, Police kept strict watch over us.

Though at a stretch I stayed in the Mother's house for one year, much opportunity was not available for her *darsan* except in the morning when we all paid our respects to her.

It may not be out of place to narrate here one incident which will testify the profound motherly affection of the Holy Mother for all and sundry. While seated in the Udbodhan one morning we received the news that a young girl had attempted to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Ganga but people came in and took her to the Kali temple of Baghbazar. Revered Swami Saradananda sent me there to find out if the girl was willing to come to the Mother's house. I went to her and said, 'There's the Mother's house over here. If you like you may go there.' People assembled there approved of the proposal and sent her along with me. All over her body there were marks of wound. The Mother received her very affectionately, took in and made her put on fresh dress. The girl was kept there with care in her house for two days during which time she dowered her with her great affection. It appeared that the girl was very happy these two days. I do not know what conversation transpired between her and the Holy Mother. But after two days her address was elicited and the guardians informed, as a result of which one gentleman came driving a car after night fall. Before sending away the girl with him, the Mother advised the gentleman for long to the effect that in future he should not tyrranize her any more and from now on he should treat her well.

In connection with this incident I chanced to come across a C. I. D man who happened to know me well. And thus Police came to know of my stay at Udbodhan. After a few days the higher Police Officer intimated Revered Swami Saradananda that we were required to see him. Swami Saradananda took me with him and saw the Police Officer. The Consequence was that I had to stay away from Udbodhan for one and a half years. Swami Saradananda was incomprable in his love and affection. But for his grace it would have been impossible for young men like us who were implicated with the revolutionary movement of the time to come under the shelter of Sri Ramakrishna.

After this incident I went upstairs in Udbodhan to take leave of the Mother. She herself became overwhelmed to witness my suffering and overwhelmed me too with her affection and grace. Again and again she sounded these words of fearlessness in my ears: 'Don't fear. Sri Ramakrishna will get made things all right.' Even today my heart continues to remain full with the import of that message which came out of her blessed mouth. Even today when I remember this my mind is filled with strength and peace, not of this world. I became blessed through her blessings of the day.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI SARADA DEVI— THE HOLY MOTHER —

Sarasvati Chennakesavan

The religious history of our country is full of instances of great men and women who were born, from century to century, to guide the people in their search after truth. In recent history we had a galaxy of saints and sages, who shook the world out of its complacency and startled men out of their lethargy. Perhaps this was necessary in recent years more than in the remote past. Never in the history of mankind was man so much the lord of nature as he is today. Drunk with the power of his conquest, man has progressively forgotten his own nature. Hence, it was necessary for man to be shaken out of his lethargy and shown what illusions he has been wading through. Sri Ramakrishna may be said to be the greatest of all such sages, and to mention Sri Ramakrishna without mentioning Sri Sarada Devi, his holy consort, would not be making the picture complete.

Sri Sarada Devi was born in 1853 in a small hamlet of West Bengal known as Jayrambati. Born of pious parents, she had even in her very early days a training which fitted her for her future life. Being the eldest of a large family, she often had to take care of her younger sisters and brothers and help her mother in household duties. This made her an adept in the management of a household.

As it was the custom in those days, she was married at the very tender age of five years to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then twenty three years of age. It is the Hindu Dharma that no man enters the householder's life, till he finishes his studies. More often than not, the wife of such a man was always chosen young, for it was believed that to have perfect understanding and amity between husband and wife, it is necessary that the wife be trained and given education by the husband. Therefore it was in accordance with this belief that the wedding of Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna took place. Later on when she was eighteen, she came under the profound influence of her saintly husband and he made her his first disciple and taught her, not only spiritual truths but also, social manners and household duties.

The wedded life of this holy couple is exemplary in two striking ways. First, the perfect harmony and understanding that existed between them was something beyond the normal. In spite of the external appearances of contrariness, each understood the other perfectly. Each could with the greatest ease anticipate the moods and wishes of the other and act accordingly. It is usually said that love sharpens the wit and where there is real love, understanding flows from one to the other, without any external aid such as speech. The perfect love and affection that existed between this holy couple made their minds act in unison and perfect accord. It was a love that had no selfishness; hence, it was free from all blemishes.

Secondly the union of these two great souls was free from all physical element. It was the mating of minds and souls. They were more like two dear friends living together each caring for the other in every way in which friends can care. To the ordinary mind, such behaviour may give rise to some questions.

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Did the Master, condemn by implication, all married life? If so, then why did he marry? Did he not preach renunciation as the path for liberation? Then how to reconcile between his married life and the path that he taught? To all these questions it may be answered that Sri Ramakrishna entered married life only in name, so as to show by example, that even when one is a *grihastha*, it is possible to lead a life of continence. We find many instances when Sri Sarada Devi urged the people to get married and settle down in life. She very often cited herself and the Master as example and said that there was nothing wrong in married life provided it was tempered with continence and devotion. When it is not possible to control the mind completely from hankering after sensuous pleasures, it is better that such people lead a normal life of the householder, subjecting themselves to the limitations and controls that are imposed by social customs. Renunciation of external forms of life will be of no avail unless there is also mental renunciation of the desire. Intense mental desire, coupled with external forms of renunciation will make a person only a hypocrite and never true to oneself. Sannyasa in action is what the life of Sri Sarada Devi portrays.

The philosophy of Sri Sarada is the same as that of the Master, Sri Ramakrishna. This is the ancient philosophy of Vedantic non-dualism. It is a way of life, an ideal belief in the light of which man can always correct his behaviour. It is a religion for the devotee, a philosophy for the intellectual, an ethical code for the atheist. Hence Sri Ramakrishna showed how this philosophy of non-dualism can be the guiding principle of every man's life irrespective of his religion, creed, or country. The purpose of both philosophy and religion is the same, the only difference between them being in their methods of approach. Both want to realize the nature of the Self. But philosophy rests on the evidence of the *Sruti* coupled with rational investigation, whereas religion is based on belief in the words of the *Sruti* and the evidence of personal experience. It is faith and experience that rule religion, and reason that rules philosophy. The philosophy of Sri Sarada Devi is a combination of these two approaches and is drastically practical. Certain philosophical principles established on rational grounds by great sages like Sri Sankaracharya and based on the *Srutis* are accepted as fundamental. Of these, that ultimate reality is only one without a second, is the basic principle. This one appears to be many because of our ignorance. When this ignorance is transcended and a knowledge of the non-dual arises, then, everything else fades away. The aim of doing austerities and worship is to make the mind progressively free from this *maya*, which obscures the mind and veils reality. Isvara, the personal God Himself, is only this Highest Brahman limited by the principle of maya. When Brahman-knowledge arises, the Holy Mother says 'In course of time one does not feel even the existence of God. After attaining wisdom (jnana), one sees that Gods and Deities are all maya. Everything comes into existence in time and also disappears in time...God and such things really disappear at the dawn of knowledge[1]'. There is yet another saying of the Mother where the unreality of things is brought out with great force. 'The body and the shadow are

1. P. 415. *Sri Sarada Devi—The Holy Mother*, Pub. Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4. 2nd Edition.

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the same[2]'. Illustrating this with the help of dream experience, she says 'It is nothing but dream. What you dreamt last night does not exist now...A farmer who lost a son dreamt that he was a king and a father of eight sons. When the dream vanished he said to his wife, "Shall I weep for my eight children or for this one?"'[3]

The disciples of Sri Sarada Devi are assailed with doubts just like any normal person. For instance one disciple wants to know if there is non-difference between God and man, why should man pray to God asking for salvation? If we are all God's 'own' then why fret and worry about *sadhana* at all? Such a question has to be faced by all Advaitins and absolutists in general. Sadhana of any type as such is not an absolute essential for the realization of one's own nature. But there is no doubt that sadhana of any type helps to make the body and mind pure. Worship or prayer is helpful in that it helps the mind to attain concentration. Referring to realization, the Mother says, 'It is true. It may happen even out of season' and continues in the same context 'Must you not sit with the fishing rod in your hand, if you want to catch the fish?' thereby meaning that a certain amount of physical and mental discipline is essential if one is to attain that calmness of mind which is necessary for contemplation. It is only when one can calmly contemplate, that a discerning knowledge of that which is real will come to a person.

Throughout the life of these two great people, Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, there is an insistence on certain disciplines and the advocacy of rituals. This is as it should be. First the external senses will have to be brought under control, and for this such mechanical aids are necessary. No doubt for the realization of the truth of Vedanta no external aid is prescribed, but it is not all people who can achieve that internal state of bliss without external aids. To men of ignorance and limited capacities, it is necessary to have external reminders. Hence the insistence on external forms of worship. Mother asks in a certain context, 'Do you know the significance of Japa and other spiritual practices? By these the power of the sense-organs is subdued'[4].

The Holy Mother was one who believed that only sannyasa can lead to *moksha*, hence her unbounded veneration for the sannyasins. But, she gives a warning against pseudo-sannyasins and says, 'Is it possible, my child, to get rid of vanity,—vanity of beauty, vanity of virtue, vanity of knowledge, and vanity of holy life?'[5]. At the same time, her philosophy required, not mere renunciation of actions, but the spirit of renunciation. It was her belief that even people leading a life of the householder, with all its troubles, can be sannyasins in the real sense. 'Even a householder can be an Isvarakoti, what is the harm?'[6] Renunciation and dispassion are the keynotes of Sarada Devi's philosophy.

Sri Sarada Devi is worshipped as the Holy Mother, as the female aspect of Reality. But to a Vedantin, ultimate reality has no sex, for it is beyond all differences. Hence the question may arise as to how to reconcile between the two aspects in which God is worshipped. At a certain stage, Sri Ramakrishna is said to be the incarnation of God and also, it is said that the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna are not different from each

2. *ib.* P. 420. 3. *ib.* P. 423. 4. *ib.* P. 403.
5. *ib.* P. 408. 6. *ib.* P. 410.

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other. The doubt as to how to understand this is voiced by the disciple when he asks 'Naturally and spontaneously I know the mother who gave birth to my body as my own mother. But can I think of you likewise?' To this she replies 'He alone is our father and mother. He alone has become our father and mother'[7]. This idea of the motherhood and fatherhood of God is merely symbolical. We usually attach certain qualities to woman and certain others to man. The former are said to be gentle, affectionate, sympathetic and kind. The latter are said to be harshly righteous, strict, unemotional, correctly logical in their attitudes. But all these qualities are always found mixed in people in a complementary way. When one set of qualities is predominant there is the female aspect and when the other the male. But there is no absolute division. Hence ultimate Reality, limited as Iswara is viewed both as man and woman and worshipped according to the propensities of the devotees. To us, who are in ignorance, there is the difference of man and woman, but from the point of view of higher reality there is no such difference. The Holy Mother herself says that between her and Sri Ramakrishna there is no difference. She says, 'Do not make any distinction between, Sri Ramakrishna and me. Meditate on and pray to the particular aspect of the Divinity revealed to you'[8]. The same idea is expressed implicitly by the Holy Mother when she yielded to give her *Prasada* to a woman devotee[9]. Again when a devotee complained of the difficulty of worshipping the Master as the Mother, she says, 'Our Master alone is Mahesvara and Mahesvari as well. He alone is the embodiment of all mystic syllables One can worship through him all Gods and Goddesses. You can address him as Mahesvara as well as Mahesvari.'[10]

The life of Sri Sarada Devi is a practical embodiment of her philosophy. It was her task to complete and complement the the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. This she did more by practice than by precept. He gave the ideal of non-duality and she taught ways and means of implementing this in this life of dualities. Motherhood of God indicates not so much the difference of sex, but unbounded love which characterizes all actions of a mother and which should be the motive force of all our activities. Not only should one love and cherish the good and beautiful things, but also one should have infinite compassion and love towards the sinful and ugly. Suffering in any form moved the Mother to tears, showing thereby what incomparable love she had for all creation. Forbearance with evil, not being idle, devotion to high ideals are some of the ethical principles that the Mother taught by her daily conduct and behaviour.

Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna were but one embodiment of the Divine. They have made their lives exemplary so that the lesser human beings like us may profit and learn that the truth behind all appearances is That Which is without a second.

One must practise spiritual disciplines such as worship and so forth. As one gets the fragrance of a flower by handling it or as one gets the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, in the same manner one gets spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God. But you can realise Him right now if you become desireless.

HOLY MOTHER

7. *ib.* P. 466. 8. *ib.* P. 315. 9. *ib.* P. 317. 10. *ib.* P. 476.

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Holy Mother at Fifty-Two

Holy Mother

Drawn by
FRANK DORAK

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LIVING GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Sarojini Naidu

The Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was celebrated last year (in 1936-37) when men and women of all countries and of all faiths participated in the celebration, because they found in him the personification of their spiritual ideals. Sri Ramakrishna, illiterate though he was, emancipated millions of people, thereby proving the futility of mere learning. Mere learning was not enough. What counted was the spirit, the soul in man, to realise God.

Ramakrishna never forgot that man by himself or woman by herself could not become great, could not become a complete ideal of humanity, unless the two together became one spirit, one prayer, one endeavour and one attainment, making a perfect ideal of humanity.

Ramakrishna said to his wife: You cannot have what other women have, for I have to be a great man, father of humanity and you must be mother.[1] Very few women would have the courage to say 'yes'. When she met her husband she was a little Bengali girl in a border sari with 'kumkum' on her forehead and with a youthful ambition of wifehood and motherhood. Unlike ordinary women, she said: I will learn from you what you want me to become. I will learn wisdom. And he said: You cannot be just a mother of children born of your flesh but a mother of children born of the spirit.

They knew how Sri Saradamani Devi learned at the Master's feet and how it must have been difficult for her to lead that lonely life. She had all the feminine qualities of sweetness and modesty. She did the cooking for her husband and attended to his needs.

When they had read all the books in the world, when they had passed all the examinations and taken all the degrees they found that knowledge was of no value unless it became love and service. Cleverness and intelligence were of no use unless they were transmuted into love.

That was the lesson that Mahatma Gandhi had taught them. He was the nearest approach to Sri Ramakrishna, essentially the same in spirit, with abounding love and unquenchable thirst to serve all.

The spirit of service to humanity was in greater evidence during the period of Sri Saradamani's widowhood than when she shared the joys and sorrows of her husband. She felt she had a mission to fulfil. She became Sakti and gathered round her more and more men and women. Ramakrishna left her to be his living gospel. By sheer beauty of spirit and force of courage she made men reverence her.

Every woman had to be in herself a gospel of love and service. Every widow had to take lesson from her who transmuted every tear into a pearl of love and service and, instead of wasting her life in endless sorrow, should realise her message.

They had millions of widows in this country and they all wailed and mourned over their husbands. Saradamani Devi's life and example was a lesson to all those women.

No man became great by himself unless the woman on whom he depended had an element of greatness. Many great men had their progress arrested by their foolish wives. Whether young or old, happy or unhappy, married or unmarried, let them take Sri Saradamani Devi as their guiding star. Her example would never grow old-fashioned; it would live throughout the ages, because she lived for a great ideal, a noble ideal.

Let them, in honouring the memory of a great and simple woman, try to make their lives in accord with hers.

The Ramakrishna Mission had spread far and wide, even to distant California where men and women came to hear his gospel and honour his memory, because great men had no race, no country. They were for the world and for all time, and it was up to Indians to show to the world that they were the inheritors of the great heritage left by persons like Ramakrishna and Saradamani Devi.

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1. The actual conversation as recorded in their biographies is as follows:

'"Do you want to drag me down to Maya?" Sri Ramakrishna asked her (Sri Sarada Devi) once in the early days of his association at Dakshineswar, "Why should I do that" came the prompt reply, "I have come only to help you in the path of religious life."'

Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4, 2nd Edn. p. 36-37—Ed.

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FRANK BORAK
THE VEDANTA KESARI
The Holy Mother Birth Centenary Number

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The story of Sri Sarada Devi's life is simple and outwardly uneventful. She was born, exactly a hundred years ago in a remote village of Bengal, of very poor parents. Being the eldest child in the family she naturally was expected to do her share of work in the domestic field and render a helping hand to the parents in every possible way. She herself has related on several occasions, little incidents from her childhood days; such as, how she would gather weed for the cattle standing hours together in neck deep water, or husk the paddy, when she was only six or seven years old.

When only five she was married to a man who was then four times her age, and considered mad by the world. But the little girl was too young to understand these complex things. All that she knew was, she was married and that her husband lived far beyond the fields of Jayrambati. The short, in between periods that she had spent in his company had given her precious memories of sweet love and enduring happiness which she reared secretly in her heart, waiting for the day, when she would be able to go to him in the garden of Dakshineswar. Meanwhile she must live the life of a daughter in her father's house carrying out the daily routine of household work cheerfully, devotedly. Even at this early stage a most remarkable feature about her mental make-up was noticed; this quality of the mind was, as if the second nature of Sarada Devi and remained with her throughout. This little girl was as if happiness personified. No matter what she did, how she lived there was a happiness, a peace, which radiated all round her enveloping those who came in contact with her. The outward hard life that she lived, never disturbed this joyousness within. What the secret was of this great joy, great calm, seemed to be beyond human understanding. Perhaps the father, Ramachandra had caught an occasional glimpse of the secret, for he often wondered at his daughter, loved her all the more for this, and felt she was no ordinary child. He wondered very often at his great fortune in having her as a daughter and would tell his wife not to displease her or make Sarada work too hard.

For sixteen years Sarada Devi lived in her father's house, rearing her younger brothers and attending to all the household duties. Meanwhile hundreds of rumours were afloat about her mad husband. These stories hurt her terribly but never shook her confidence. She would have liked to go herself to Dakshineswar to confirm her conviction yet her modest nature would not allow her to speak out her thoughts even to her mother. One day finding an opportunity at last, she conveyed her desire through a friend to accompany the pilgrims going to Gangasagar Mela. Ramachandra guessed the true reason and offered to take her himself to Dakshineswar.

Henceforth Sarada's life unfolds as the wife and mother all at once. It is a unique life, unparalleled in the history of mankind. Whoever had heard of a wife accepted by a Sannyasin, a Paramahamsa? Yet this was the role that Sarada was destined to play for the following fifteen years of her life.

She arrived there late in the evening, her heart in a turmoil. But like a flash all the fears, doubts were gone. Ramakrishna said, 'Ah, you are here! All right.'

Sarada Devi lived mostly in Dakshineswar for the next fifteen years, going to her village or Kamarpukur off and on. She lived

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in a small room in the Nahabat Khana, some yards away from Sri Ramakrishna's room. Her time was spent in looking after her husband's comforts, and his mother's, cooking food for him and his devotees, and attending to the women devotees who visited the Temple and were sent to her by Sri Ramakrishna. It was strenuous work. Modesty was her second nature. She would get up at three in the morning, finish the toilet and sit down to do japam etc. Rest of the day she would be busy cooking and doing various household work, without even once stirring out of the little room. Not till the evening fell, that she would come out quietly to attend to her natural requirements. But this did not rob her of her happiness. She lived in a state of bliss which kept her oblivious of daily physical discomforts and hardships. Outwardly this was very ordinary life, life of any Hindu wife. Yet it is so bewildering in its very simplicity that one just wonders. Sri Ramakrishna himself said to Hriday once,

> 'You may treat me as you like but be careful with her. If you ever incur her displeasure there will not be any refuge for you even in the three worlds.'

These words are very significant. Who is Sarada Devi, just a simple ordinary village girl, who happened to be Sri Ramakrishna's wife or much more? Do we revere her only because she is the wife of Sri Ramakrishna or because she is herself? What is the significance of her life? And the answer is, if the life of Sri Ramakrishna has any meaning, any message, the life of Holy Mother is the continuation of that message, unfoldment of that great message; if Sri Ramakrishna is the Truth, she is the way to realise It. Did not she herself tell him:

> 'I have come to help you achieve your goal'?

And later on did not Sri Ramakrishna himself, before discarding his mortal frame, beseech: 'Will you not finish the work which I have only begun'?

These are very significant words. It is impossible to understand their full implication.

Sarada Devi's modesty was not, which is born of ignorance and stupidity but which is the result of coming face to face with Reality, one's true identity. Her individuality was completely merged into that of the Master. She was 'Ramakrishnamayi,' which explains to some extent her role as Sarada Devi!

Apart from the spiritual aspect of her great life she has placed an ideal before the women of this age which is ancient and yet modern. Women after centuries of suffering and bondage have been emancipated. How should they use this hard won freedom? Must they take revenge on men for their age old tyranny, pay them back in their own coin? Sarada Devi's life is a challenge to the modern woman. She has shown how by loving, sharing and helping, a woman must live her life. As a daughter she must be loyal to her parents, share their burden, as a wife she must be loyal to her husband, must be his comforter, his guide and his comrade. But to aspire to this role she will have to work with body, mind and soul, not in a spirit of rivalry, but in a spirit of dedication, comradeship. She must be wise to gain his confidence, brave to give him courage, tolerent to overlook his shortcomings. She does not have to be a rival of the male but a comrade; hand in hand they, man and woman, have to tread the path. Both are complementary to each other. One cannot do without the other. Why should the idea of being independent of the other arise at all? Till the time you are conscious of your sex

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you must be true to its ideals. This is the challenge of Sri Sarada's great life.

To the women who are filled with the idea of service she has shown by her very life how best it can be done. You serve as you do your children, with the unselfish love of a mother, giving all not with the idea of doing service. This is the full, true unfoldment of the woman's nature. If you have the strength, the great heart, accept the humanity as your family of children and love them with all you have.

In her later life of widowhood, Sarada Devi's nature reached to its full heights as the Holy Mother. It is true that all her actions even when she was barely a child, were the outcome of the ever dominant motherly instinct within her. But so far it had worked as if, from behind the veil. Now the veil was discarded and the manifestation of motherhood shone forth in its full glory. Once she had frankly acknowledged to Master, 'I cannot refuse anything when I am asked to give as a mother.' And as a mother with body, soul and mind together she lived the next thirty-five years of her life on this earth. Never once did she discriminate between her children, be they rich or poor, noble or wicked, good or evil, weak or strong, man or woman, young or old. No matter who they were, they were alike in love and care, that was showered upon them. Her method of guiding and teaching was exactly the same as the Master's, nay, much more expansive. For whereas the Master lived as the Mother's child, she lived as Mother Herself. And the wonder was that though her mind dwelt in the highest realms of God-consciousness, she kept her body and instincts through sheer force of will on the worldly plane. Never before, the world had beheld such an accumulation of spiritual force veiled in a garb so lowly. We have not yet understood even a fraction of what she is, because she keeps herself so well hidden. Yet we know and feel that it is a life which inspires and sustains thousands today. One who takes refuge in it is never disappointed.

RAMAKRISHNA EVERYWHERE

SWAMI PARAMESWARANANDA

Things began to so happen from some timo before the Holy Mother gave up her body on July 21, 1920. Sometimes she would be noticed showering her motherly affection on someone viewing Sri Ramakrishna within him. There was a time when on one occasion she did not place the food offerings before the Lord because a lad of thirteen or fourteen had cast greedy glances on the same. Now one day I found her feeding the same boy with a part of offering before worship. I hurriedly intervened: 'How's that Mother? Before making offering of this to the Lord, you are giving a part of it to the boy!' 'Ah my child, let him eat. My Lord is there within him.'

One night it was found that one of her lady attendants had no pillow to lay her head on. She at once gave her pillow and asked her to use it. Somehow I had appeared there on businesss. I forbade the attendant to use Mother's pillow. Mother interposed, 'Let her use this. Sri Ramakrishna is verily within you all.' One day I myself became the target. She held before me the cup of milk meant to be offered to the Lord and asked me to drink. Frightened and flabbergasted I said, 'What on earth are you about, Mother? You have not yet offered this milk to the Lord, and you are asking me to drink the same from the very cup meant for use in the shrine alone? I can't take this.' 'Please drink, my child', the Mother supplicated. 'It is within you that the Lord is.'

Mother used to rear a parrot and call it by the name, Gangaram. What amount of love and care she used to shower on it! Gangaram won't take any other lesson but only call 'Mā, Mā'. One day I found her feeding Gangaram with *halwa* from the plate before offering it to the Lord. I ran up to her and protested, 'The puja is not yet done. And you are feeding Gangaram with this *halwa*!' 'My child,' the Mother said as before, 'Sri Ramakrishna is verily within it.'

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Standing on the plain one may try to measure the height of a mountain or looking into the sea one may try to gauge the depth of the ocean, such is this pretentious attempt to understand the personality of the Holy Mother.

The privileged distinction of the modern woman today is the broad platform of liberty that she has won. Political, economic, social and religious—in these main currents of life the woman in this country stands free to work and build up her own life. But having acquired this unrestrained freedom of movement it is imperative for her to pause and ask herself the fundamental question—What is it that she wants. 'Liberty is not only a privilege, but a test' says Lecomte du Nouy, the famous biologist. And if she were to understand the co-relation between the two the modern woman will be able to fulfil the great promise that the future holds before her by evolving a more perfect life, instead of regressing towards animality.

What is a more perfect life? A Sanskrit poet says:

> 'Food, sleep, fear and co-habitation are common between human beings and animals. Only dharma distinguishes the former from the latter.'

Dharma alone has been a woman's friend in this country. Even when the woman had no freedom in the world her sure footing was on the solid ground of dharma. In peace and prosperity, in calamity and distress she remained steady because her dharma sustained her. The word, derived from the root 'dhri' to uphold, in its most comprehensive sense means the moral law that upholds life. It includes the cultivation of such virtues as non-injury, truthfulness, forbearance, generosity, purity etc., besides including the highest point in morality, namely, looking upon others just as one looks upon oneself.[1] It brought in her life contentment and harmony, stability and security, aspiration and worship—in short, all that went to make life rich.

But unfortunately today Dharma is understood only as the observance of certain rites, the form and practice of which have lost their meaning. The result is that the thinking modern woman has given up the support of dharma altogether. But she has found no substitute for it. Education may have sharpened her wits and made her intellect penetrative but it has made her lose the warmth, the feeling of the heart and the sentiments of universal love and generosity.

The aim of all human efforts is the attainment of happiness it is said. Then why is it that with so much of progress and improvement in the outward conditions of life, people are not happy? What is lacking? Why does one hear so many discordant notes? The answer to it is this that in conquering the outer forces of nature we have lost the force of the inner spirit that alone can mould us. The gifts of thought and free action were given to us to evolve the inner life perfectly—'in the image of the Lord'—but we have missed the goal. Instead today we stand:

> Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
> Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd
> Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
> Whose vague resolves never have been fulfill'd,
> For whom each year we see
> Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
> Who hesitate and falter life away,
> And lose tomorrow the ground won today—

In such conditions woman has to play a more important part, that of regenerating the creative forces of life by practising the virtues of tolerance, selflessness, fortitude and generosity. She has to see through the superficialities of modern life, push them aside and with all her liberty and strength re-establish the true values of life.

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1. दया सर्वभूतेषु क्षान्तिरनसूया शौचमनायासो मङ्गलमकार्पण्यमस्पृहेति ॥ (*Gautama Dh. Sutra*, VIII, 23-24) and श्रूयतां धर्मसर्वस्वं श्रुत्वा चैवावधार्यताम्। आत्मनः प्रतिकूलानि परेषां न समाचरेत्॥ (Devala Sm.) *Vide;* P. V. Kane, *The History of Dharmasastra*, II. I. p. 7.

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At this juncture rare personalities like the Holy Mother invite attention. Let not the sophisticated city-dweller look askance at the simple village lady. True, she led no social or political movements; no academic honours adorned her nor did acts of martyrdom or sacrifice hallow her saintliness, yet she achieved the goal of human life, perfection, and that is to be the guiding star for the woman of the present.

Outwardly the Holy Mother was only a poor brahmin lady who spent most of her time in a hamlet or in the untenantable Nahabat of the temple garden of Dakshineswar, or in the Cossipore garden house. Her face was covered with a veil, she spoke in whispers and she was always busy with the ordinary duties of her strange household consisting of monks and devotees—men, women and children. It is not necessary to go into her unique spiritual life. It is precisely in her day-to-day life that we shall try to see the inner force which challenges us to follow her, if we can.

Sri Sarada Devi's normal life is uneventful. Her marriage at the age of five to a youth of twenty-three, rumours about his madness, her bold step in going to him as a forgotten wife, her services to her master, his illness and death, her loneliness and poverty, responsibility of her brothers and their families after her mother's passing away, family entanglements till the last days—these are circumstances through which many a woman has to pass in life.

But to us it is not important to consider *what* she did but *how* she did it; how her attitude toward life allowed the spirit to blossom and perfect itself. We may take a few incidents which would show the different sides of her personality. Take for instance, the virtue of compassion. When Sarada was ten years old a bad year set in. Hundreds of famine-stricken people used to come to her father's door for a handful of Khichuri. Pots after pots were emptied and fresh Khichuri cooked. But the hot stuff could not be eaten and the hungry would be impatient. Little Sarada could not see the agony of the starving people. She would untiringly fan it to make it cool so that they would be able to eat it soon.

A simple act which in ordinary households many young girls would do. Such duties of daily life are soon forgotten. But this pathetic scene left an indelible impression on Sarada Devi's compassionate mind and it enlarged her sympathies Never in future could she stand any one remaining hungry. Remembering the expressions of these poor people she would in later days say,

> 'Is it a joke to bear the agony of an empty stomach?'

This kindness of hers extended even to animals. Years after, in her Calcutta house, all were resting in the after-noon. A beggar came and shouted for alms. The monks shouted, 'Go away now. Don't disturb us.' At these words Mother was piqued and exclaimed to her companions:

> 'Have you heard their remarks? They have driven away the poor man. They could not shake off their idleness and give something to the beggar. He only wanted a handful of rice. And they could not take the trouble to do this bit of work. Is it proper to deprive a man of what is his due? Even to the cow we owe these peelings of the vegetables. We should hold them near her mouth.'

In these days we talk of fraternity. But how many of us feel for others and give in charity considering it as *another's due?*

In the Holy Mother compassion combined with rare fortitude. The adverse circumstances in which she often fell, and the patience and faith with which she suffered them prove this.

When a child-wife grows up, her rightful place is by the side of her husband. But destiny had chosen otherwise for Sarada. Her husband was away, people said he had become mad. In the small village it was difficult for her to move about without being criticized. She used to keep indoors, for on seeing her, people would blurt out, 'Dear me, Syama's daughter has been married to a lunatic.' To the young hopeful wife this was the hardest blow in life. But her anxious thought remained locked up within her own mind silently she bore the ridicule. But courage did not fail her. When an opportunity pre-

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sented itself she proceeded to Dakshineswar, though not sent for, with this determination that even if her husband were really mad she would henceforward stay in his service. We know her patience was well rewarded.

On this occasion, however, there was a ray of hope—the possible union with her Master. But after the demise of her Master, destiny dealt a harder blow. On return from a pilgrimage after his death she settled in Kamarpukur. A poor helpless widow, alone, and unaided. She had not money even to buy salt! And the village women were again critical. She had received her Master's command not to give up her bracelets which a Hindu widow is required to cast off. She had therefore to face public criticism. She withstood everything patiently for she was completely resigned to the Divine Will. There was no complaint, no bitterness. Not even did her mother who stayed in Jayrambati, three miles away, come to know of her hardships. What reticence! What resignation! What fortitude!

The story of the Holy Mother's immaculate purity is wonderful. At the young age of eighteen, in the full bloom of youth, she was united with her husband. He asked her,

'Do you want to drag me down into maya?'

But she played the part of a real 'Sahadharmini.'

'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life.'

She had not to lament like Devahuti to Kardama:

'Till now have I passed my time in sensual enjoyments and have abandoned the thoughts on God. I have been deluded by the maya of God that having obtained a husband capable of giving salvation. I did not secure means to liberate myself from this bondage.'[2]

On the contrary even her husband had to offer her a tribute with the words,

'Had she not been so pure who knows if my self-control would not have broken down and body-consciousness arisen?'

Though the Holy Mother believed in observing the rules of external purity in daily life she had no obsessions in the matter like the orthodox women. She insisted, on the other hand, on the internal purification. 'The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure.' While leading an austere life at Dakshineswar she used to pray to the Lord, looking up at the moon, 'Oh Lord, there is a stain even in the moon, but let there not be the least trace of stain in my mind.' Thus she showed by her own instance that purity is not a passive virtue but something to strive for.

In speech she was always courteous. When in later days she had to put up with the perversities of her mad sister-in-law and the obstinacy of Radhu, she seldom said a rude word to them but prayed to God to forgive them. On the other hand when someone in Jayrambati replied harshly to her insane sister-in-law she said:

'One should not hurt others even by words. One must not speak even an unpleasant truth unnecessarily.'

The Holy Mother's broadmindedness and motherly love is worth recording. She did not deliver lectures on the virtues of equality and tolerance. She practised them. Take for instance the case of Amjed. He was one of the labourers constructing her house at Jayrambati. One day the Holy Mother called him to have meals in her house, served him food herself and washed the place when he had eaten. When her niece objected, she firmly replied: 'Keep quiet. Even this is my son exactly in the sense that Sarat is.' To her both were the same; a monk, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and her devotee who served her with undivided devotion in her last days and the ex-dacoit muslim labourer. No caste or class distinction held her back. Her only concern was that he should eat with satisfaction. She reproached her niece who threw food at him from a distance, saying,

'If you serve a person in this way, can he eat with relish?'

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2. *The Bhagavata*, III. 23. 53, 57.

एतावतालं कालेन व्यतिक्रान्तेन मे प्रभो। इन्द्रियार्थप्रसङ्गेन परित्यक्तपरात्मनः॥
साहं भगवतो नूनं वञ्चिता मायया दृढम्। यत्त्वां विमुक्तिदं प्राप्य न मुमुक्षेय बन्धनात्॥

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Behind this attitude is not only love and consideration, but there is a conscious acceptance of a moral principle, namely, to establish human dignity by seeing the Immanent in all.

Another instance of her charity is still more striking. The world usually passes harsher judgment on a woman who has sinned and closes all doors of mercy on her. The Holy Mother's all-embracing love surpassed this standard of morality of the world. Where she saw sincere repentance or an honest effort to be good she always gave encouragement and help. Even during her early life at Dakshineswar she was known to be gracious towards such women. Sri Ramakrishna also restrained from imposing his views on her in this matter.

At one time a certain woman of a good family who had gone astray felt repentant and came to ask for her grace. The Mother was kind to her and even initiated her. Another influential lady-devotee objected to her presence and went to the extent of saying that she would not go to the Mother's house till the other woman stopped frequenting it. The Holy Mother paid no heed to it and said that she was equally the mother of the good and the bad. This answer is an eye-opener to those who try to be kind to their unfortunate sisters.

Instances like these which reflect the light of her enlightened heart can be multiplied. They show that greatness lies not in doing big works but in performing even small acts with perfection. Such acts bring about a harmonious blending of all the forces of life and contribute something permanent to human progress.

Today when in the world the fire of intolerance and selfishness is raging wild the Holy Mother's last message of universal goodwill is worth remembering:

> 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own.'

In society women have to play the part of peace-makers, pacifiers. It is a shame that in all spheres of life it is said that women are responsible for creating disharmony, that women are foolish, women are selfish. It is a myth, let us prove it. Selflessness and endurance are natural to us. It is we who can fight the miseries of the world 'with a mother's heart and a hero's will' and establish peace on earth.

Let it not be said that the Holy Mother's teachings are not for us, for she was a spiritual giant while we are not. Like the sun's rays that fall equally on the peasant's cottage or the prince's palace her teachings are helpful to one and all. So let us follow her. Let us give up all small thoughts, let us forgo our selfish ends and hearken to her words, for like the 'Hound of Heaven' she says:

> All which thy child's mistake
> Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
> Rise, clasp my hand, and come!

RADHU'S CAT

Radharani had a pet cat. The Holy Mother arranged for it a quarter of a seer of milk everyday. It cultivated the fearlessness of lying down at the feet of Mother. Sometimes when the Mother would frighten it with a stick just to please others (who could not reconcile themselves with the existence of the cat) it would take shelter at the Mother's feet alone. Mother would then throw away the stick and all else too will laugh out. The cat has its inborn habit of eating by stealing. Mother would not be annoyed at this. She would rather say, 'To steal is their dharma, my child; who is ever there to feed them with affection.' But Jnan Maharaj had declared a war against that cat. One day he lifted it up and just dashed it on the ground, witnessing which Mother's face turned black in pain. Daily minor tortures of course were there. Inspite of Jnan Maharaj's oppression, the cat managed to increase its family for the protection of which it appeared to depend on the mercy of Radhu and the Mother. Meanwhile it was time for Holy Mother to go to Calcutta. Calling Jnan Maharaj by her side the Mother said, 'Jnan, while cooking please take a separate quota of rice for the cat too. See that it has not to go to anyone else's house. In that case people will scold us, my child'. This was but a popular argument. The Mother however knew that just this will not change the fortunes of the cat. So she said again, 'Look, here, Jnan, don't you please beat the cats. I am there in them too.' After hearing this Jnan Maharaj could not any more use his hand or stick for the purpose to which he had so liberally and energetically engaged them previously. He would from now on be found busy frying fish for cats, to help make their rice savoury.

From *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*

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HOMES OF THE HOLY MOTHER

Swami Shraddhananda

Homes affect our thoughts and emotions as much as, if not more than, persons that live in homes. Persons depart but homes remain, rousing in our memory all the wealth of hopes and fulfilments, love and inspiration that persons dwelling there once held to us. They have mingled in homes and outlived their mortal existence through the abiding spirit of homes. Multitudes throng there in deep veneration retrospecting the days when the dearest ones lived and loved, talked and taught, thought and worked.

It is in this context that we can find the rationale of the unprecedented enthusiasm of the half-a-million pilgrims—men and women of all shades and distinctions—that assembled in the small village of Jayrambati in West Bengal three months ago on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother. Right from December 27, 1953, the inauguration of the Centenary, there have been celebrations in many places all over the country, but which one of them could claim that uniqueness of invoking the spirit of the Mother on the very soil where she was born in flesh one hundred years ago? Which one could bring into the mind the Mother's numerous sweet associations with so much spontaneity as that in this first home of the Mother?

Jayrambati offers to a visitor today much the same look as it had a century ago when Sri Sarada Devi was born on its bosom. Situated fairly distant from railway communications[1] the village has been maintaining even now a sort of simple sequestered life with very little of the glaze and glare of 'modernism.' The people[2] mostly depending on agriculture for their livelihood dwell in compactly located thatched houses over a small area. The hamlet proper is surrounded by the outer village, th. rich-soiled vast fields with their seasona rotations of various crops. We can well visualize a little girl of eight or ten years carrying a vessel of parched rice, a small pot of molasses and a brass jar of drinking water to distant fields where her father's hired labourers were busy ploughing the land or reaping the harvest. This little girl was Sarada who being the eldest child of her poor parents had taken upon herself the task of helping them as much as she could both in and out of the house.

One remarkable charm of Jayrambati is its river, the winding Amodar or Amodar-Ganga, as the Holy Mother sometimes called it in adoration. It forms the northern boundary of the village and also flows on its east a mile away. In the winter and summer Amodar is just a shrunken brook with knee-deep water[3] which is delightfully clear and transparent but during the rains it is a broad swollen powerful stream. All along the circuitous bank extending well over two miles one finds different types of trees, bowers, small bushes and grassy meadows giving a picturesque appearance to the region. At one place there is a big stretch of tortoise-shaped elevated land—the 'Kurma-prishtha' according to Tantric traditions—well-suited for solitary meditation. Swami Saradananda and

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1. Vishnupur (distance from Calcutta: 125 miles) on the Howrah-Gomoh line of the Eastern Railway is 28 miles away, while Tarakeswar (distance from Calcutta: 34 miles) on the Howrah-Tarakeswar line of the same Railway is 30 miles. Another railway station from which one can approach Jayrambati is Chapadanga (distance from Calcutta: nearly 30 miles) on the Martin Light Railway. It is about 25 miles from Jayrambati. The fourth railway station for Jayrambati is Burdwan Junction (distance from Calcutta: 59 miles) which is about 35 miles distant. This last route was the oft-followed one till the first decade of this century. At present visitors generally take up the first route entailing least walking.

2. There are nearly one hundred families in the village about a dozen of which belongs to the Brahmana caste. The rest are 'Sadgopas' (cultivators), 'Goālās' (cowherds), Blacksmiths etc.,—all coming under the Sudra caste. Some of the Brahmins are priests—others have taken to agriculture though not tilling the ground themselves.

3. In isolated spots there are deep pools,

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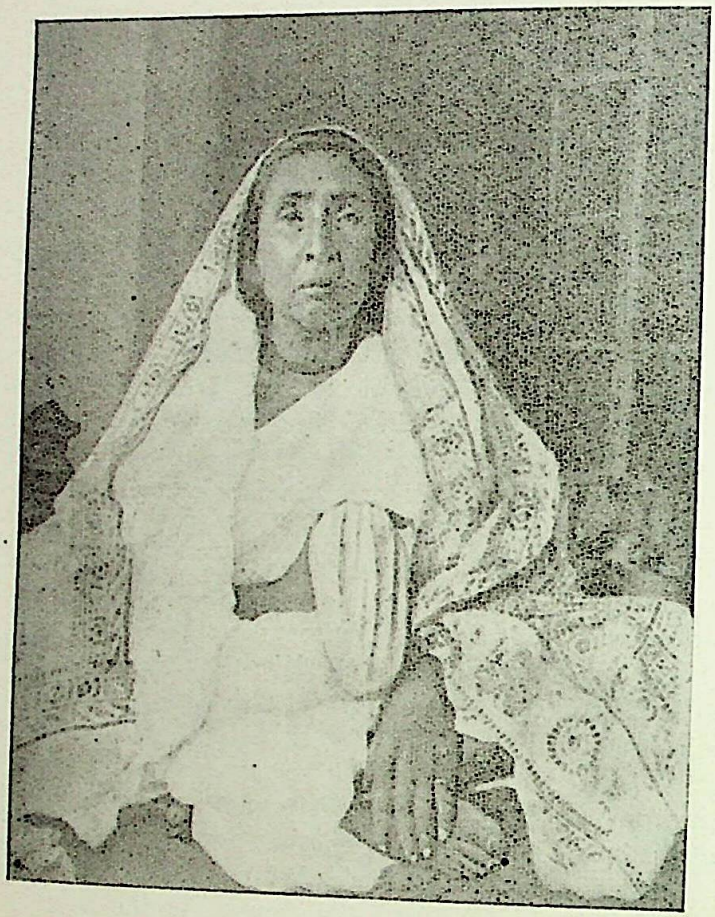

Syamasundari Devi
Mother of the Holy Mother

in the wake of him many other Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order would in former days spend some silent hours in spiritual contemplation on this spot whenever they visited Jayrambati. As you walk along the bank about a furlong right west from this 'Kurma-prishtha' you come to the bathing ghat where the Holy Mother used to take her bath. Though the ghat is covered by tall grass and thorny shrubs the ashramites and devotees prefer to come here when they wish to bathe in Amodar-Ganga.

Crossing the half-a-mile long paddy fields southward you come to the north-end of the central pathway of the village. The 'Matri-mandir'—the temple built on the birthplace of Sarada Devi by the efforts of Swami Saradananda in 1923—two years after her passing away—is close to your right. Before the installation of the marble image of the Holy Mother on April 8, 1954, during her recent Centenary celebrations, the altar had for worship a fairly big-sized oil-painting of Mother. The temple too had some additions in structure just before the celebrations. Though not rich in architectural contents the edifice with its plain white colour and towering crest commands a majestic view in the rural setting around. To the village folk in and about Jayrambati, the temple during the first years of its existence must have been an object of great curiosity and speculation. The lady whose big coloured picture they saw worshipped inside was to them only a Brahmin woman, with much piety and benevolence of course, about which they had no doubt, but not such as to be extolled as a Goddess like their own Shitala[4] or Shashthi![5] In fact for a long time people used to say, 'There's the temple of Sarada Bāmni' (Bengali colloquial for Brahmani). With the passing of years however the woman in Sarada Devi grew dimmer in popular memory and villagers in these parts are now quite accustomed to view the Holy Mother as one like Sita or Radha. A visitor to the recent Centenary celebrations could distinctly note in the thousands of the local people that assembled, the same joy and inspiration in calling her 'Mā' (Mother), as in the 'devotees proper' that came from distant places. Great is the expectation and excitement of the villagers for the annual function of 'Akshaya Tritiya' in the Ashrama which is

4. Goddess controlling pestilence, particularly small-pox.
5. Goddess favouring progeny.

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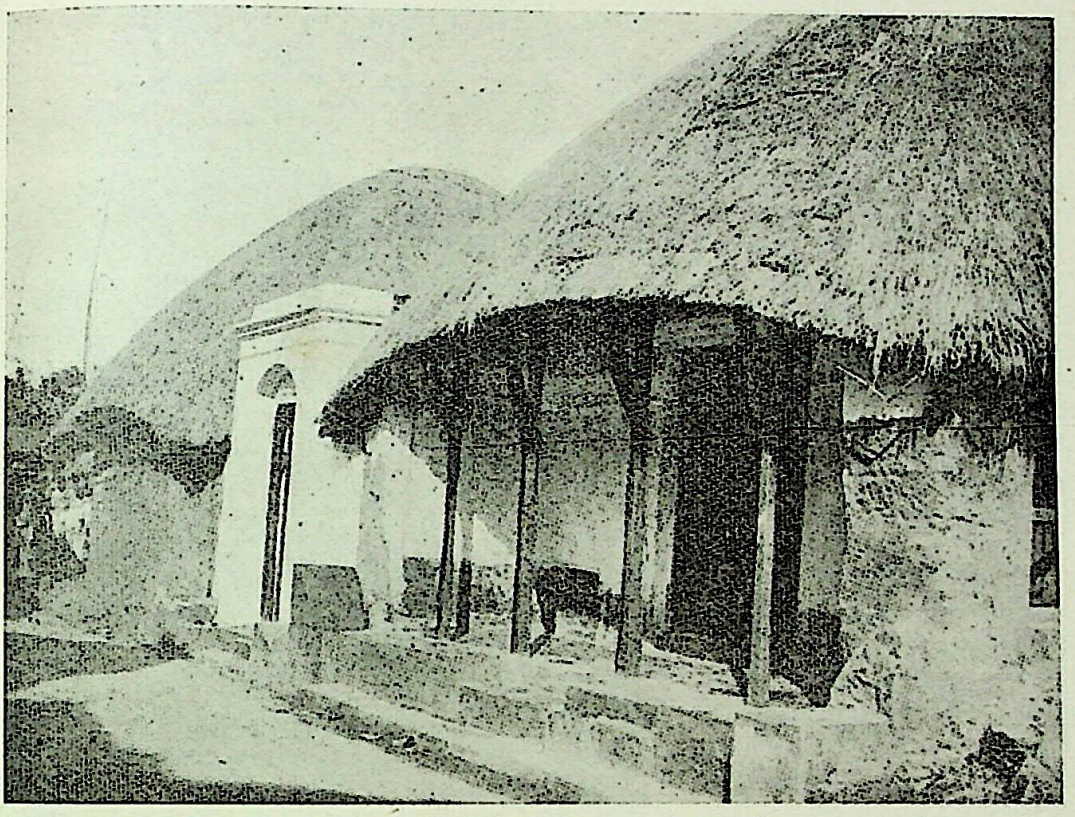

Holy Mother's New House at Jayrambati

held to commemorate the consecration of the temple. Thousands are sumptuously fed on the occasion and various kinds of innocent amusements like opera, fireworks etc., are arranged. The philanthropic activities of the Ashrama—the school, the dispensary, the library and the like have also drawn the admiration and gratitude of the village folk. One can imagine their sub-conscious feeling of pride in the matter of all this unselfish good work of the 'Babajis' (popular Bengali term for monks) being inspired by that Brahmin lady of their own Jayrambati! As you proceed further down the road a fairly big tank is seen to your left. It is 'Punya Pukur' (lit. the holy pond) with its many associations of the Holy Mother whose 'new house'[6] is on its south-west corner. On the western side of the road you can see a cluster of houses. These belonged to the uncles—Holy Mother's brothers none of whom is living now. One of the houses—that of Prasanna-Māmā (lit. maternal uncle) eldest of the brothers is particularly associated with the Mother. It was here that she mostly used to stay before the construction of the 'new house.' The thatched cottage where she lived has of late been purchased by the Holy Mother Centenary Committee. It has a narrow portico and a small courtyard in front. The whole apartment after thorough repairs has been fenced and is being preserved as a memorial.

Following the road southwards still you will find on the left side a narrow lane leading you eastward to the temple of Goddess Simha-vahini, looked upon with great veneration in these localities. Tales of Her numerous acts of benign Grace on the worshippers are known to every child here. Holy Mother herself was an ardent devotee of Simha-vahini and in fact it was her example and precepts that contribu-

6. Built by Swami Saradananda at a cost of Rs. 2,000/— in 1916. It has five rooms and a small courtyard. Holy Mother lived here for nearly four years.

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ted a good deal to the present popularity of the Goddess.[7]

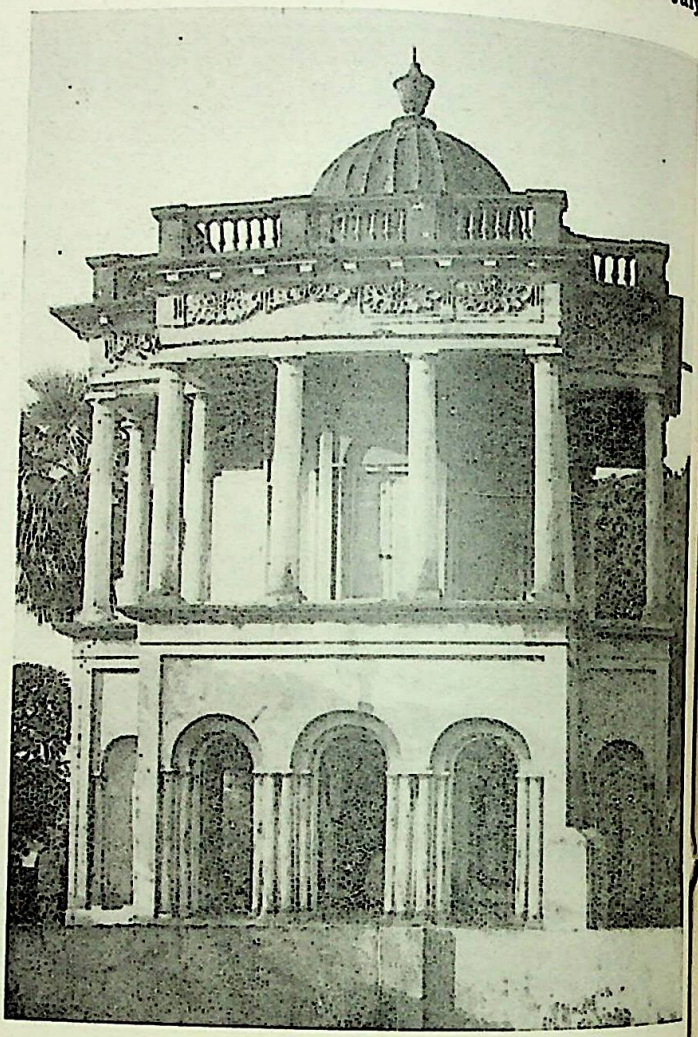
'Talpukur' (named after the palmyra trees on its embankments) the big tank of the Bannerjees (hence its other name, 'Bannerjee-pukur') is at the southern extremity of the road which turns here at a right angle towards the east. 'Talpukur' supplied drinking water to the village before the days of tube-wells. How many times had Holy Mother trod this path to the tank to fetch water along with other ladies of the village!

At a point midway on the main thoroughfare mentioned above, another fairly broad road opens out westward and then to the north. It crosses the Amodar at about three-fourths of a mile northwest of Jayrambati over a permanent bridge and runs zigzag through Deshra, where the Post Office is located, and Koalpara[8] to Kotulpur, from where buses for the Vishnupur Railway Station are available.[9] Sihore so often mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna in his dialogues is two miles and half west of Jayrambati. It is the parental home of Syamasundari Devi, (the mother of the Holy Mother) and also of Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew and companion of his early days at Dakshineswar. It was at Sihore, so goes a story, that the baby Sarada in her mother's lap pointed out Gadadhar among the crowd witnessing an opera as her future husband!

Such is Jayrambati the little village in a remote interior of West Bengal that brought in its bosom and nurtured Sarada Devi the Holy Mother who cherished so much love and reverence for its soil! Once she had been noticed to bow to the ground here and utter with deep emotion:

'जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी'

Completely identifying herself with Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother as a typical Hindu wife naturally looked upon Kamarpukur, the



Nahabat in the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar
Where the Holy Mother stayed for many years and served Sri Ramakrishna

7. Formerly the image had only a thatched shed for its shelter. Now the shrine has brick walls and roof of corrugated iron sheets. On one seat is Simha-vahini with her two companions. On another seat is 'Manasa', the goddess of serpents.

8. This village, four miles away from Jayrambati has many associations of the Holy Mother. There is a branch Math and also the 'Jagadamba Ashrama'—a house built by the devotees for her where she stayed several times.

9. Just before the Centenary Celebrations this eight mile road from Jayrambati to Kotulpur has been metalled, so that buses from Vishnupur are now regularly running straight to Jayrambati.

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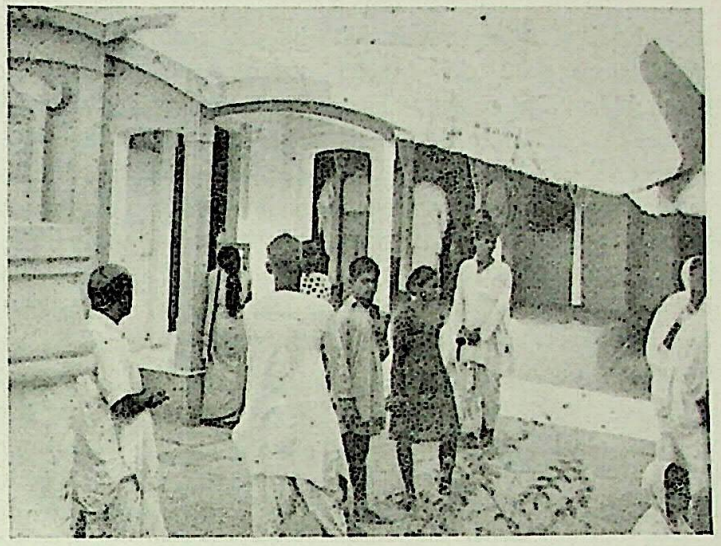
birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, as her very home. This village three miles east of Jayrambati has a much bigger area and population. The parental house of Sri Ramakrishna has undergone some changes since 1951 when a temple was constructed over the very spot where he was born. But the original thatched dwelling cottages[10] still stand in the same setting as before. In one of these specified as 'Thakur's cottage', Sri Ramakrishna had stayed so many times during his visits to Kamarpukur. Once he had told Holy Mother,



Sri Ramakrishna's Paternal Home at Kamarpukur

> 'You do rather live at Kamarpukur (after my physical demise). Grow some greens. These with rice will be your food. And pass your time in chanting the name of Hari.'

And yet on another occasion,

> 'After I leave this world the devotees may sometimes lodge you comfortably in their homes, but do never allow your own cottage at Kamarpukur to be ruined.'

After the passing away of the Master, Holy Mother literally carried out his injunctions. And how did she go to fulfil his command? Today devotees pour wealth like water to get carved her marble image or for building her temple. But when on her return from Brindavan the Holy Mother went from Calcutta to Kamarpukur, she had to walk a distance of sixteen miles from Burdwan to Uchalan, for the simple reason that she had no money. From September 1887 to April 1888 and again from February 1889 to about the end of that year her solitary days at Kamarpukur were so different from the time when she had come and stayed there as the girl-wife in the loving care of Chandra Devi, her mother-in-law or when she had lived there with Sri Ramakrishna for the long nine months in 1867. Those golden days were no more. She was now only a poor Brahmin widow with none of her blood-relations in affluent circumstances who could help her financially. On hearing of her return to Kamarpukur, Syamasundari Devi had asked her to come to Jayrambati. So she went there one day to meet her mother. Syamasundari Devi wept to see her dressed almost like a beggar woman. She asked her repeatedly to stay with her at Jayrambati, but the Holy Mother would not agree to it, nor disclose the miserable condition of her life. She only said, 'I am going back to Kamarpukur. Let things shape themselves as He wills.'

The devotees at Calcutta were absolutely in dark about the amount of austerity the Mother was undergoing here at her home at Kamarpukur. Many days she had not the means to purchase the little salt necessary to savour her coarse meal. For many months she had to manage her dress with only one or two torn and stitched garments. This physical hardship was not all. There were the uncharitable criticisms from superstitious hostile village folk, the family tensions among the nephews of Sri Ramakrishna and so on—all so much taxing to her patience. Yet Mother bore them all in her overwhelming love and veneration for the

10. There are three of them in an east-west line, the door of each facing South. The eastern room was used as a parlour. The middle one was for Rameswar (Sri Ramakrishna's next elder brother) and his family. The cottage on the extreme west was Sri Ramakrishna's. The family shrine in the western side of the courtyard with images of 'Raghuvir', 'Rameswar Siva' and pitcher-symbol for Mother 'Shitala' was re-erected with bricks in 1951 when Sri Ramakrishna's stone temple came into existence.

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sacred soil of Kamarpukur, with its numerous associations with the Master scattered all around the large village. The indigent forlorn widow brooded over by the mighty spirit of Sri Ramakrishna had unique experiences and visions here of days gone by and of days yet to come. With absolute resignation to the will of her Lord she stuck to her lot, bad or sad as it came, for it came from her Lord. She said in later days recounting her experiences of this significant period of her life,

> 'While staying alone in Kamarpukur, I thought within myself, "I have no child. There is no one in this world whom I can call my *own*. What will happen to me?" Then the Master appeared to me and said, "Well, you want a son. I have given you so many jewels of sons. And in course of time you will hear many more people addressing you as Mother."'

This home-experience of Sri Sarada Devi is so meaningful today in the context of her coming as the Mother to millions of homes in the world, as the Mother of all. Her home-austerities of the time enabled her to deliver this unique message in the last moments of her life:

> '...Learn to make the whole world your *own*. No one is a stranger my child; the whole world is your own!'

Right north on the opposite side of the house stood the Siva temple of the 'Yugis' where Chandra Devi had the vision relating to Sri Ramakrishna's birth. Further north stood the huge tank 'Haldarpukur' so often mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna in his witty conversations recorded in the *Gospel* by 'M'. The Holy Mother too had a strange vision when as a girl-wife of thirteen years age, she would be going to bathe there alone. Some eight unknown girls would appear on the way and follow her to the pond, bathe along with her, escort her back to the house and then disappear whither she did not understand. This incident happened for days together. East of Sri Ramakrishna's home stood the brick buildings of the Lahas. At the centre of the village was the big tank Kamarpukur (lit. the tank of the smiths) with the house of the Dhani (the blacksmith woman, from whom young Gadadhar took alms after his investiture with sacred thread) on its south-west. The house of Chinu—the bracelet-maker stood not very far. Chinnu was one of the earliest among the village-folk to recognize the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna. At the western outskirts of the village ran the narrow canal, 'Bhutir-Khal' with the cremation ground on its slope where Sri Ramakrishna while at his home used to spend hours in meditation. Further north-west stood the extensive mango-groves where the boy Gadadhar played with his companions, sang devotional songs and acted scenes from the Puranas. These and several others stood silent witnesses to hundreds of incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's boyhood and youth. Though in her later days the Holy Mother did not stay at Kamarpukur for long periods at a stretch, yet occasions of her short visits were many. She held the very soil of Kamarpukur in the highest esteem for she well knew 'Really and truly he (Sri Ramakrishna) was God Himself.' And he was born in Kamarpukur. In the imagination of a devotee today, Kamarpukur is a place of pilgrimage not only for its being the cradle of Sri Ramakrishna's life, but also for its bearing the stamp of the sweet joys and sorrows that the Holy Mother experienced there both in company with her Divine Consort and alone.

* * *

The premises which is now No. 1, Udbodhan Lane in a dingy corner of north Calcutta is aptly called by devotees 'Sri Sri Mayer Bati', house of the Holy Mother, for it was here that she lived whenever she came to Calcutta during the last eleven years of her life. These were the years of her most intensive spiritual ministration to the people at large. During these years thousands upon thousands came to her feet in search of light, solace and peace and seldom one was disappointed. Sri Ramakrishna had once said to the Holy Mother,

> 'People in Calcutta live like worms in darkness. You must look after them.'

This was a regular commission which Sri Sarada Devi fulfilled to the letter. In the enlightened darkness of Calcutta she was so to say the unlettered Light. The 'Udbodhan', better known as 'Mother's house', became the veritable headquarters of the Goddess Saraswati, from where wisdom permeated to different quarters of the world. The three-storeyed building was built by Swami Saradananda in

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1909 mainly[11] as her Calcutta residence and partly to function as the Udbodhan Office. Numerous are the associations that this home of the Holy Mother holds to monks and devotees who had seen her here and had occasions to realise her unbounded love and grace. The shrine with its altar where the Mother herself performed her simple daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna is kept almost in the same setting as in her lifetime. On the altar you find two framed photographs of Sri Ramakrishna much faded now by the passage of time which were worshipped by the Mother. One of these she used to carry with her when away from Calcutta, the other remaining here permanently. In the western half of the room is placed the cot where she slept. A big framed photograph of the Mother clothed in sari is kept in a slightly inclined vertical position against pillows. The figure in the picture looks so living with those calm compassionate eyes, as if she is still sitting there ready with her benedictions for the devotees coming in a line and prostrating at her feet silently one after another—the scene which was common everyday when she was here in flesh and blood! Men devotees could have her *darsan* only in the afternoon. For ladies, she was much more free. There was no bar to their coming to her almost at any hour and talk to her anything they liked. Naturally the men devotees craved more to see the Mother at Jayrambati where there were opportunities for closer contact.

This Calcutta home of the Holy Mother has a spacious terrace from which you get an extensive view of the Ganga. The Mother would often sit on an elevated seat in a corner of this terrace and look at the Belur Math on the western bank and also at the Dakshineswar temple further up the river on the eastern side. Downstairs, the outer apartment was meant for the office and residence of the male inmates—the inner apartment consisting of the kitchen and stores etc.. At the southern wall. of this latter block there was a backdoor. The Holy Mother would go for her bath in the Ganga through this door. As you get into the house through its front entrance you find a

Mother's House, 'Udbodhan

11. The Holy Mother first came to the house on May 23, 1909. It had then six rooms in the ground floor, three on the second storey and one on the third. The rooms on the ground floor were for the publication department of the Udbodhan and its sadhu-workers. The upper rooms were meant for the Holy Mother and the ladies that lived with her. Two more rooms were added to the house later on.

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small room to your right. It is the 'Baithak-Khana', the drawing room, where during Holy Mother's lifetime you would invariably find the tall and sturdy figure of a Swami sitting at his desk, whose great pride was to feel and say that he was but the 'Durwan'—the gate-keeper of Mother's house! This was Swami Saradananda.

July 21, 1920 was that eventful day at this home of the Holy Mother. The Light that was she went out from our mortal vision. They carried the still body up the Kasipur Road, halting for a moment in front of the garden where Sri Ramakrishna passed away thirty-four years ago and then reached Belur Math after crossing the Ganga in boats. The flames consumed what was mortal but were not extinguished themselves. They have spread and spread since then, kindling the Light in homes far and near, shedding love and solace and holding strength and fearlessness to the thousands, that may not have seen Her but have known Her to be their very Mother for all times, here as well as hereafter.

A TRIBUTE TO HOLY MOTHER

AN AUSTRALIAN DEVOTEE

Ah! Moon to whom Sarada's eyes were raised!
What thinkest thou of Her on Whom thou gazest?
Look lovingly, in this thy latest glance,
For Sarada's passing beyond thy shining lance!

Oh cosmic moon! Goddess of night!
Sarada knows that, lovely as thou art,
Even thy beauty, She must pierce through;
Realises, due to Holy Ramakrishna's guiding light!

Yea, through, beyond all Maya's veiling wall,
Discarding lovely impermanence as well as gross,
Sarada transcends, passes beyond all dross,
Right to the very Divine Core of all!

No more sad round of births and deaths for her,
Who served so long, renounced so lovingly!
That when Her mission o'er, foundations truly laid,
Her centre to the Centre sped, and stayed!

Her pathway? 'Learn to make the whole world your own!'
'No one is a stranger. See only good in everyone!'
Ego-less, pure, non-possessive Mother-love,
Bringing Peace, the stepping-stone and crest to life's unfolding!

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Holy Mother

Bronze Bust made by
Malvina Hoffman
For the chapel of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York

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How The Holy Mother Strikes Me, A Western Woman
A Symposium

SHE MERELY LIVED
Sister Devamata

Innumerable were the devotees who gathered at Holy Mother's feet to crave her blessing and learn of her. She herself told me that when she was in her village she would be awakened frequently at two or three o'clock in the morning by eager pilgrims, who not daring to cross the long stretch of unshaded fields under the scorching heat of the sun, made the journey after nightfall, thus arriving very late. Most often they were personally unknown to her; but always it was her custom to rise, prepare food for them with her own hands and then send them to rest in the guest house, built by a village disciple for the use of her devotees.

Also in Calcutta nearly every day brought some group of devout pilgrims to pay her homage. It mattered not whence they came. Geographical boundaries, caste or creed, did not exist for her. The same tender welcome awaited all who sought her whether from East or West. All alike were her children. Hers was an all-embracing mother-heart which wrapped itself in love about every child born of woman, and her family was the human race. ...

At the time when I came...Mother was living in a new dwelling given her by devoted followers of Sri Ramakrishna. She occupied the upper floor with the few women disciples who were always with her.

She lived as they did, performing the same homely tasks, making no effort to differentiate herself from others save by greater modesty, greater gentleness and humility. I remember one day seeing her bow in deepest reverence before a rustic Brahmin who had come to see her, because he chanced to be a village Guru or spiritual teacher. By her outward manner she was the most obscure of all the household, yet beneath the veil of simplicity which enveloped her there was a lofty majesty of bearing which caught the heart and bowed it in prayerful homage at her feet. The human covering was too thin to hide the radiance of divine consciousness beneath. She never taught, seldom ever counselled. She merely lived. And who can tell how many lives were cleansed and exalted by that holy living?...

A gentle cheerfulness there was about her always, and a lurking sense of humour which made it possible to talk to her of anything. The smallest concern was of interest to her and she could lose herself in childish play with as much zest as the little niece of eight, Radhu by name, who lived with her. I can still see her keen amusement over a jack-in-the-box which I brought the little niece from an English shop. Each time it sprang out with the familiar squeak, she would repeat the sound, laughing heartily.

Another day when I came in, I found her engaged in stringing little glass beads and Radhu exclaimed: 'My Baby Krishna had no jewels as the images in the temples have.' There was no mockery of play in Mother's manner. Even this little toy was a sacred symbol of Divinity, and she decked it with the same grave devotion as a devout nun might dress the Baby Jesus for a Christmas *Creche* ...

Those who had the rare blessing of living with Holy Mother learned that religion was a sweet, natural joyous thing; that purity and holiness were tangible realities; that the odour of sanctity was literally a sweet perfume overlaying and destroying the foulness of material selfishness. Compassion, devotion, God-union were her very nature; one scarcely knew that she possessed them. It was through the soothing benediction of a word or touch that one sensed their presence.

Such lives are like a lake or river. The sun may draw up its waters, but they fall again to refresh the earth. So these saintly ones in body may be lifted from our sight, but their holy influence falls back upon us to revive our fainting hearts and give us new spiritual life, new strength of purpose.

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SNOW WHITE

Elizabeth Davidson

India and the World became sanctified anew a century ago by the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and his wife, Sarada Devi. The spiritual realizations of this illumined pair have once more made significant the truths of the great world religions. Their example is dispelling the heavy clouds of scepticism that obscure the Spirit in the hearts of men. Against the darkness of a materialistic age, their immaculate lives shine forth as did the flight of snow-white cranes against dark rain clouds, whose sight entranced Ramakrishna in his boyhood, stirring his soul to ecstasy.

The celebration of the Holy Mother's Centenary comes as a particular blessing to the women of the West. By pondering on the unfoldment of her life through the stages of childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, modern women can clearly perceive the direction their own lives should take to achieve greater dignity, grace, and fearlessness. An understanding of this ideal woman, whose every action was spontaneously expressive of her purity, spirituality, and all-embracing love, can raise us above our habitual selfishness and narrowness of vision.

The special characteristics of little Sarada's childhood were loving confidence and respect for her mother and father. From the time of her birth in the village of Jayrambati, a hundred years ago, to the concluding years of her life, the Holy Mother looked upon the ideals of India's spiritual culture with profound reverence and the seed was sown when as a tiny girl she observed the pure and unselfish characters of her parents. She thus described them in later years:

> 'My mother was simple, guileless and compassionate...My father was a very good man... He had unswerving devotion to the ideal of a Brahmin's life...He was so simple and humble—he would address in a friendly way every passer-by that crossed his door and say cordially, "Come in, brother, have a smoke."'

Since her parents were deeply religious, it was easier for her to feel, even at an early age, the vivid presence of God. Far too few modern western children enjoy the sense of security a religious home provides, or learn their first lessons from the example of parents who depend on God and whose every judgment they can respect.

At the age of six, Sarada became the child-bride of Ramakrishna, who had been appointed priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and was at this time experiencing intense yearning for God. The marriage, which had been suggested by his anxious mother as a means of turning his mind toward worldly responsibilities, took place at Jayrambati. Sarada's parents were happy to see their little daughter married and, following the Hindu custom, after the ceremony took her to the bridegroom's house at Kamarpukur and then back to Jayrambati to remain with them till she should reach the proper age to live with her husband. The custom of child-marriage suggests certain advantages, for it helps the bride to adjust herself to the ideals of her husband and his family while at the same time her mind ceases to be distracted by idle dreams. Being still immature she feels secure in the affection of her elders. At the same time she becomes acquainted with the particular problems she will soon be called upon to face.

Sarada's love and respect for her parents gave her the inner strength to endure every kind of hardship. During her tenth year, a terrible famine occurred in Bengal. Following the Brahminical tradition of self-sacrifice and service, her father would daily take rice and pulses from their small supply and feed his starving neighbours before allowing his family their meagre portion. This experience of willing self-denial made a deep impression on the sensitive child. Nothing henceforward appeared too difficult, for she had observed the calmness of her parents in this calamity. The Holy Mother said later on, describing her daily duties at home: 'In my childhood I

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sometimes used to go into neck-deep water and cut grass for the cows. I carried tiffin to the labourers in the field.' She said further, 'When I cooked, my father helped me to take down the big rice-pot from the oven.' Thus we can picture the small girl participating in the strenuous work of field and home, where she also shared with her mother the care of her four younger brothers. In addition to her training at home, her close contact with nature and the simplicity of village life made her reactions to her surroundings direct and sure.

Sarada's happiest moments, however, were spent in worshipping two small clay images of Kali and Lakshmi, in praying to God for devotion, and in practising daily meditation —activities quite usual in a Brahmin family. Her playmates would accompany her to hear dramatic recitals of the Hindu epics and together they would attend the many religious festivals of the countryside. During this period Sarada rapidly assimilated the ideals and traditions of Indian culture. Modern western children would similarly benefit if they were permitted to take a larger measure of responsiblity at home, as they did in earlier days. But the moment a child withdraws from the essential duties of life, he is likely to become ego-centric and insecure. Moreover, the absence of religious ideals and disciplines in many modern families in the West robs the growing child of a spiritual concept of life, which formerly included cultivation of the heart and training of the will.

The virtues of self-restraint, obedience, and loving service to those near and dear to her were well developed in Sarada Devi when she was fourteen years old, manifesting in her a maturity and wisdom beyond her years. At this time, when Sri Ramakrishna returned to his home from Calcutta for a short visit, she was asked to spend three months at Kamarpukur. Ramakrishna used this opportunity to teach his young wife, from his own store of experience, many things both of the world and of the Spirit. Sarada recognized the high state of her husband's mind, and abandoned herself heart and soul to his instruction. She was eager to mould her character according to his spiritual ideals, which found an echo in her pure mind. Recalling this period, Sarada Devi said later: 'I then felt as if a pitcher of bliss were kept in my heart. It became a constant experience with me.' She knew nothing of the restlessness and dissatisfaction experienced by the average adolescent girl in the West.

During these formative years, which Sarada spent in her village home, the virtues of her childhood became transformed into firm traits of character. Truthfulness and modesty were natural to her, for she had nothing to conceal from her parents or playmates, nor did she look for their praise. Her inner life unfolded of itself, and she would pray, 'O Lord, make my life as pure and fragrant as the white-petalled tube-rose offered in worship.' Though her thoughts dwelt on her saintly husband and teacher at the Dakshineswar temple garden, she applied herself untiringly to the duties of the family. Disturbing rumours about Ramakrishna's divine madness soon reached the far-off village, and Sarada knew herself to be an object of both gossip and pity. As she later narrated: 'In my early days at Jayrambati I was always busy with some work or other, and would never visit my neighbours; for people would blurt out on seeing me, "Dear me, Syama's daughter has been married to a lunatic." I avoided meeting anybody in order to escape such criticism.' This isolation prepared her for her future isolation when she would hide herself from the devotees at Dakshineswar.

With great patience Sarada endured the jibes of the villagers, refusing to allow public opinion to disturb her inner tranquillity and faith; but in the end of March 1872, she decided that it was her duty to be near her husband and offer him her service, and so started on foot with her father for the Kali Temple, a distance of eighty miles. At Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna received his young wife tenderly and once more took up the task of instructing her in the performance of domestic duties as well as in the means of attaining the knowledge of Brahman.

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The secret of one's success in social relationships, he told her, depended entirely on one's capacity to adjust one's conduct according to time, place, and circumstance, and the nature of the people one had to deal with. Then, explaining to her the practice of spiritual discipline—prayer, meditation, the repetition of God's name, and intimate communion with Him—Ramakrishna said:

> 'God is everybody's Beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. All have the same right to pray to him, and out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call on Him with sincerity.'

Every word uttered by Sri Ramakrishna became an integral part of Sarada Devi's thought and conduct. This great receptivity was possible because of her innate patience and modesty, her earnest striving for the ideal set before her. Thus the simple village girl acquired a grace and dignity hardly to be imagined in the West. In India, tradition has steadily evolved, adapting itself to new conditions without giving up tested values; whereas in the West, traditions have often been destroyed. Though Science advocates experimentation, too much experimentation may be harmful to society and to the individual.

The spiritual fitness that Sri Ramakrishna recognized in his wife, after her unexpected appearance at Dakshineswar, was confirmed when a year later he performed a special rite in his room, worshipping Sarada Devi as the great Mother of the universe and offering at her feet, in a supreme act of consecration, the fruits of his austerities. This worship symbolized her full participation in his life and mission; for he knew that, after his passing away, she would complete the training of his monastic and householder disciples. Behind her modesty and meekness he saw the spiritual power latent in her heart. About Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna said to his nephew: 'I was extremely concerned about her when she first came here. She came from the country and did not know about the ways of city life. I thought people would criticize her movements...But she is so wonderful that she has hidden herself completely from view.' To her he said earnestly, 'The people round about live like worms in darkness; you should look after them.' The Holy Mother shows us that through self-abandonment to the spiritual teacher the gates of the heart are opened and God enters within—how much better than self-abandonment to one's lower instincts and impulses! Further, it is evident that the Holy Mother could endure apparent neglect and privations with a tranquil mind because of the faith in and reverence for Sri Ramakrishna which at all times filled her heart with humility and love. Modern women too often fail to realize that marriage to a man whose character and ideals one cannot respect soon becomes a form of slavery. Instead, women are demanding more and more freedom and equality in marriage, not realizing that service and obedience in themselves are not hard to bear when a husband is worthy of one's devotion.

It was because of her spiritual stature alone that Sarada Devi, after having been worshipped as a veritable goddess, could completely forget and efface herself for the next fourteen years in looking after the physical comforts of Sri Ramakrishna and his aged mother, who lived near her at the temple garden. Her life was one of complete seclusion, considerable discomfort, and incessant labour in preparing suitable food for Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. Nor did she neglect her spiritual practices, which were carried on unnoticed by the many visitors who flocked to see Sri Ramakrishna. At the time of his fatal illness, when he was moved into the city of Calcutta, Sarada Devi accepted cheerfully even greater inconveniences, for it was necessary for her to prepare his diet in a tiny room, unobserved by all but a few of the young disciples who acted as his attendants.

But when, almost a year later, Sri Ramakrishna died, Sarada Devi was overwhelmed with grief. After his cremation, she was removing her ornaments, as Hindu widows do on their husband's death, when in a vision Sri Ramakrishna appeared before her and said: 'What are you doing? I have not gone

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away. I have only passed from one room to another.' But not until this vision was repeated at Brindavan, where the Holy Mother went on pilgrimage, was her grief somewhat assuaged. Thus assured of his living presence, she decided to continue wearing her ornaments and red-bordered cloth, instead of wearing the customary white cloth of widowhood. She was, however, frequently persecuted for not following the customs of Hindu society in this respect, especially when she visited Kamarpukur a year later. Just before his passing away, Sri Ramakrishna had said to her: 'After my death, go to Kamarpukur and live on whatever you got—be it mere boiled rice and greens—and spend your time repeating the name of Hari.' In obedience to his wish, Sarada Devi decided to live in utter solitude and poverty in his ancestral home. Here she showed the same wonderful fearlessness and devotion that had brought her to Dakshineswar as a young woman, unperturbed by the gossip of the villagers of Jayrambati. For the villagers of Kamarpukur attacked her unconventional dress and solitary life until her patience and serenity finally taught them to accept this outer sign of her inner dedication to her husband.

After spending a year at Kamarpukur, some devotees from Calcutta found the Holy Mother living in great want and persuaded her to return to her native village and family. Here Sarada Devi faced innumerable difficulties with calm fortitude, for her relatives began at once to impose upon her. She felt it to be her duty, however, to yield to their incessant demands. Thus after several years she adopted Radhu, the half-witted child of her youngest brother who had died leaving his insane wife and infant to her care. And on Radhu Sarada Devi bestowed such intense affection and concern that she actually experienced all the trials of motherhood. Though she was fully aware of the unreality of worldly relationships, the Holy Mother participated whole-heartedly in the affairs of the family, never failing to fulfil her obligations cheerfully. But so completely was her soul absorbed in Sri Ramakrishna, for her the vivid manifestation of God, that she remained untouched by the frequent rudeness of her brothers and sisters-in-law.

The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna also requested the Holy Mother to spend some time in Calcutta every year, which she gladly agreed to do. Soon men and women devotees began to visit her in large numbers, both in Calcutta and in Jayrambati, gradually robbing her of her accustomed privacy. She permitted people of all castes and levels of spiritual development to come to her without distinction. Such liberality was unusual in anyone with so little experience of the world; it was born of her deep spirituality, where the oneness of existence was no mere theory. She approached all in the same loving spirit, sometimes to the annoyance of her more conservative companions. Thus she served food to the Moslem labourers who were building her house at Jayrambati, and gratefully accepted the gift of a village sweeper. The example of her sympathy and catholicity should be followed by women everywhere; for a woman's life finds its fulfilment through the insight of a loving heart.

Sarada Devi's liberality was also one of the expressions of her essential motherliness. She could view human frailties without criticism or condemnation. In Brindavan, after Sri Ramakrishna's death, the Holy Mother had prayed with tears in her eyes: 'O! Lord, remove from me the habit of finding fault with others. May I never find fault with anybody.' On another occasion she said: 'Formerly I too would see the defects of others. Then I prayed to the Master. Thus did I get rid of the habit. You may help a man in thousands of ways, but if you do him one wrong, he will at once turn his face away from you in anger. It is the nature of men only to see defects. One should learn to appreciate others' virtues...Do not look at the faults of others lest your eyes should become impure.' When someone remonstrated with her for refusing to see evil, the Mother said: 'There is no want of people to see the faults of others. The world will not come to a standstill if I am otherwise.' The maternal attitude of the Mother was expressed in a gentleness and dignity which inspired reverence, never

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a sense of inaccessibility. To the importunities of discouraged seekers she showed the calm and tender concern of a mother. Whenever she would be asked not to see a particular person because of some misconduct on his part, she would remark, 'If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?' Swami Premananda admitted that he and the other Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission were 'sending the Mother the poison we cannot take ourselves. She is giving refuge to everybody, accepting the sins of all and digesting them.' When young sannyasins came to her for advice or initiation at Jayrambati, the Mother would see to their comforts with great eagerness, cooking their favourite dishes and waiting on them herself. When they left she would often follow them to the doorstep with tears in her eyes.

The Holy Mother taught her disciples principally by her example, showing them how to completely control their anger, passion, greed and lust. She would ask them all to practise regular prayer and meditation, and through simple devotion to God learn to renounce desires and selfishness. To the householders she would say: 'Why can't one lead a good life if one is married? The mind alone is everything.' But to the young men who were preparing themselves to adopt the monastic life she said: 'What is there in worldly life? What inordinate attachment people have for it!...See how one's attention and energies are all dissipated...What does one obtain by the realization of God? One's mind becomes pure, and through the pure mind knowledge and illumination are awakened.' Now and then she would say to her women companions, 'Ah! with whom shall I live if there are no self-renouncing sannyasins about me?' The complete renunciation of the monk was her highest ideal.

The Holy Mother's enthusiasm for the purifying effect of unselfish work in the service of the poor and needy inspired the young monks in their new undertakings. When Swami Vivekananda asked her if it would be right for him to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, though travel across the sea was against orthodox Hindu tradition, Sarada Devi at once gave him her blessings; for she knew that he had a great mission to fulfil in America. She later described the following vision which she saw in a trance: 'I found in that state that I had travelled into a distant country. Everybody there was very affectionate to me...Sri Ramakrishna was also there. With great tenderness they made me sit by his side.' And Swami Vivekananda not only brought to America the message of his Master, Ramakrishna, but the rich memories of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual realizations, of his extraordinary relationship with the Holy Mother, and of the training of his young disciples.

Toward the close of her life, the Holy Mother came in contact with some of Vivekananda's western devotees, and though they could not understand her words, they knew that she had accepted them as her children. In illustration of her remarkable understanding, Miss McLeod described one of her visits to the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta. As numerous women devotees were bringing the Mother offerings and prostrating before her, Miss McLeod was standing there somewhat uncertainly, not knowing whether to bow down herself or not. But at once the Holy Mother caught her eye, gave her a reassuring look, and made a slight motion with her hand, as if to say, 'That is not for you.' Her motherly understanding knew no limit.

From the Holy Mother the women of East and West alike can learn to face death with the fearlessness and superior detachment derived from a God-centered life. At the approach of death, Sarada Devi refused to allow the slighest worldly interest to disturb her mind, brushing aside the burden of duty towards her family, which she had borne so patiently throughout the years. She knew that her mission was fulfilled. Her last words of advice to a devotee were these: 'Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own.'

As we meditate on the Holy Mother, the endless waves of desires and attachments are

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IT'S THAT

Hertha Martens

Although it is a fact that Holy Mother, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, is now known and worshipped not only in the East, but also in the West with its different mentality, it is difficult to define what causes this attraction and veneration in the West.

Whenever western people feel attracted or fascinated, then this is caused by some outstanding work or character of a 'Personality'. But Holy Mother, one could almost say, is just the opposite of a so-called 'Personality.'

According to the western idea a personality is a man or woman who either possesses unusual individual faculties, efficiency and dynamic power and has, by means of these, created or achieved either something extraordinary in any sphere of life,—be it in science, arts, technique, welfare etc.,—or who has developed his or her own person in a specially characteristic way, different from the average men or women. In both cases it is generally the uniqueness and the dynamic power that constitute a personality, strike us and cast his spell upon us. It is by a condensation of ego, that a personality is developed and not by dissolving the ego; whereas in Holy Mother we can find scarcely any ego at all.

What then can it be that strikes me?

When we look at her life in Dakshineswar at the side of Sri Ramakrishna, we find her to be a most charming, but very shy young wife of great reserve. Only very few disciples, even of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle were allowed to approach her. When she was going to take her bath in the Ganga, she chose a very early hour of the day when she could expect to meet nobody on her short way; or when she now and then was going to see some ladies of the neighbourhood, she again waited for a moment when she could reach there unobserved.

But inspite of this seclusive nature, she was exerting during all her life—even after her passing away—an unusual influence and authority upon innumerable people of quite different types.

From the very beginning of her stay at Dakshineswar we see her absorbed in the service of her husband and his devotees carrying through all her various duties with utmost modesty and simplicity. Soon the number of his disciples increased more and more and with them the manifold duties of the Holy Mother. From early morning till late into the night she was engaged in cooking different kinds of meals, according to the different likings which she was eager to satisfy. So it became often eleven o' clock in the night till she could finally go to bed for only a short rest; early at three o'clock in the morning she used to get up again to perform her spiritual practices.

Yet this service was to be put to a still severer test. There came the dreadful last year of Sri Ramakrishna's incurable illness. The increasing work of nursing him was accompanied by the growing anguish and anxiety at the sight of his suffering, day after day. Doctors came and went, and with them hope and despair. Nothing was of any avail. Nothing could stop the will of the Divine Who had decided to destroy this physical sheath. The full weight of this blow that Holy Mother and the disciples had to endure, can only be wholly conceived by those who had the rare good fortune to have met Sri Ramakrishna. He was their all in all, they had lived only for him; their life was rooted in him; and now he had left them alone.

(continued from the previous page)

stilled; through her the clashing fragments of experience fall into their proper places and perspective. Feeling her pure and loving presence in our hearts, a new tranquillity is born, and we are assured that through constant striving our human will must ultimately become united with the will of God.

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What agonizing suffering of hers! What inexhaustible strength of endurance! What indefatigable service and devotion! Is it this that strikes me?—it is certainly astonishing, it is overwhelming, and yet it is not exactly this, that strikes me. There have had been so much suffering and endurance and selfless service of men throughout thousands and thousands of ages, till the present day. Sometimes it showed heroic forms, sometimes it was pathetic, as in the case of the martyrs. But with Holy Mother it was quite different. It was—so to say—veiled by her great simplicity and reserve. And yet, there was something in it, something very subtle, something beyond human comprehension. But what? Will the further development of her life reveal it?

A new period of her life began. Holy Mother who had lived till then so seclusively, is now suddenly forced by the events into limelight. It is she who has to carry on the great spiritual heritage of Sri Ramakrishna. Overnight she has become the centre of the whole movement, the support of his young disciples and all his householder devotees. They are coming to her from all parts of the world: young and old, poor and rich, men and women, some seeking advice and solace, others spiritual guidance, but to her they are all alike: they are her children, and she gives to each of them what he specially needs. Her world-wide motherhood has suddenly opened into full bloom. Into a rare and delicate bloom indeed! Moreover, she had to take upon herself the difficult task of a Guru. But as soon as she had overcome her shyness and seclusiveness, it was seldom only that she refused to give initiation to anybody.

Again years elapsed. The Order of Sri Ramakrishna had long been established by Swami Vivekananda. But now, just as before, all of them came to Holy Mother for advice before any final resolve was taken, and her word was decisive. Even Swami Vivekananda, who had developed into a spiritual giant, asked for her decision and blessing before starting for America. The best of the best came to her, not only from India, but also from the sceptical West. They were most grateful for being allowed to sit at her feet and listen to her simple, affectionate words. Although she had overcome her shyness and seclusiveness for the sake of her innumerable children, her great simplicity had remained; and it may even be this which holds the key for the secret power of her being. Strangely enough, it is neither her spiritual leadership that strikes me,—for though she leads, she is no leader, she has nothing of the leader's dominating will—nor is it her world-wide Motherhood,—for all her motherly care and affection is completely impartial, somehow impersonal, or—superpersonal.

'Dive deep, dive deep, dive deep, o my mind!
Into the depth of the heart—the ocean of beauty.
There you will come by the jewel of Prema'

Thus Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his disciples again and again. Perhaps it is something at the bottom of her being—some divine gem, hidden behind the veil of her shyness and simplicity? Let us look farther back into the past. Perhaps we may find there the source of it.

Long, long ago, when she was still a little girl, there came a day when Sri Ramakrishna chose her as the companion of his life, as the companion of his divine mission. And thus began the sublime Divine Lila (sport) of which Ramprasad was singing!

'There go about a goose and a gander
in this lotus wilderness
and these are mated with each other,
Verily, they are the Spirit of Eternity and His Consort!!'

Thus the divine jewel of Prema was put into her heart.

Years later, when he came once for a short stay to his native place, Kamarpukur, his young bride, now fourteen years old, who was still in her parental home in the neighbouring village of Jayrambati, was sent for to come and live in her husband's family. And it was here that Sri Ramakrishna began to mould the subtle nature of his wife in various ways,

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by teaching her many things, from simple household duties, knowledge of human characters, up to the knowledge of God and surrender to Him. The great reaction which was caused thereby in her pure and receptive mind is to be seen from her own words: 'My heart remained incessantly so very full of an indescribable bliss, that I have always felt since then, as if a jar of bliss, full to overflowing, was installed in my heart.' It is further said that this feeling of bliss never left her and 'produced a change in all her conduct, speech, movement, work, etc.' It seems to me, that these are the first signs of all that, which caused later on her unconscious power of attraction and her great impression upon all kinds of people. It is like a faint fragrance in the air, of enchanting sweetness of which one does not know from where it comes.

Again some years had passed. Sri Sarada Devi was now eighteen years old, when the alarming rumour reached her village that Sri Ramakrishna had gone mad. Very much disquieted and yearning already for a long time to see her husband, Sri Sarada Devi seized the first opportunity to travel in the company of her father and a group of pilgrims to Dakshineshwar, to be at the side of her husband. On the way she was suffering from a heavy attack of fever and had therefore to stop in a village for some times. Due to very high temperature she lay unconscious, when she suddenly saw a girl of black complexion of indescribable beauty come and sit beside her. At the touch of her soft cool hand, the heat in her burning head and body diminished. Wonderingly she asked the girl: 'May I know where you come from?' The girl said: 'I come from Dakshineswar,' adding later on, with regard to Sri Ramakrishna, 'It is for you that I have detained him there.' And to a further question the girl answered: 'I am your sister.'

Who else could this girl of dark complexion and unearthly beauty have been than Mother Kali Herself, from the Dakshineswar Temple, who, in this way, revealed thus unmistakably to Sri Sarada Devi her divine nature and divine mission as the consort of Sri Ramakrishna.

Soon her condition improved and she could continue her journey to Dakshineswar where she was heartily welcomed by Sri Ramakrishna who took all possible care that her health was completely restored. There followed for Sri Sarada Devi some months of closest community with her husband, who was at the same time her Guru and Chosen Ideal. Once more he was training and teaching her as he did in Kamarpukur, and prepared her in this way for the zenith of her life with him: the Shodasi Puja.

It was during the night of the Phalaharini Kali Puja in May 1873, that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Mother Kali as Shodasi (as a girl of sixteen years) in the human form of his wife. At 9 o'clock in the night when everything was ready, Sri Sarada Devi was guided to his room. There she was sitting now on a specially prepared seat, in all her purity and charm. Half in trance already from the beginning, she unhesitatingly surrendered herself to all the various rituals of the Puja. Soon both their minds were united in Samadhi and were soaring higher and higher to unknown spiritual regions. Thus hour after hour elapsed. When they finally came back to the human plane, long after midnight, Sri Ramakrishna surrendered everything to her, who had become his 'Sakti', in the full significance of the word: 'his divine Power', who was to carry through his divine commission for the liberation of mankind. 'Returning to the semi-conscious state, he now gave away for ever to the lotus feet of the Devi his all—the results of his Sadhana, his rosary, etc,—along with his self.' He salutes and praises her with different *mantrams*, she who had become the embodiment of celestial beauty, as the Goddess Tripurasundari Herself and from whose body was emanating divine radiance, like floods of molten gold.

Thus the divine jewel of Prema set ablaze in her heart by the Shodasi Puja burst into its full radiance for a short span of eternity. But its reflection remained throughout the life of Holy Mother. Her own individual personality had almost completely melted in the divine radiance of Prema, and what was

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THE NEARING REMOTE

Joan Rayne ('Daya').

How the Holy Mother strikes me, a western devotee today, is the outcome of a gradual development which started three years ago and which is still going on; so my present attitude towards this great soul is by no means definite or fixed. It is merely a stage through which I am passing on my way towards an understanding of her, and cannot be described without reference to my earlier reactions. So let me go back and try to explain why, when I first read about her, the Holy Mother did not strike me at all.

Bernard Shaw says somewhere, quite rightly, that we can get no more out of reading a book than we bring to it in the way of understanding. And to my first reading of Holy Mother's life and conversations I brought no knowledge which might have enabled me to imagine Mother in her own setting, and thus see her clearly from even one of several possible points of view. Let me enlarge upon this.

To begin with, I was brought up as a Christian, and in Christian doctrine there is no conception of God as Mother. The Virgin Mary is in no way analogous to the Hindus' Divine Mother, the feminine aspect of God Who takes so many forms—Tara, Kali, Durga, Parvati and so on, and Who is expressed by innumerable abstract symbols. No matter how closely we westerners, new to Vedanta, may study the *Chandi* and other scriptures, we find ourselves bewildered; our minds are not prepared for this many-faceted deity. For most of us, God is either a man or a principle. So when we read that God, the Divine Mother, has incarnated Herself as Sri Sarada Devi, we cannot help considering such a statement a little fantastic. Anyway, that was my first reaction as I read about Mother, and it may, I think, be typical of that of other western devotees.

I encountered other obstacles too. Leaving aside any consideration of Holy Mother's Divinity and coming down to more mundane matters, what was Mother to the casual observer? An orthodox Bengali lady whose customs, sense of values, and way of living were essentially the same as those of most Hindu wives. Any Hindu can pick up a book about Holy Mother, and as he reads she will come to life. Why? Because the reader himself can fill in the details; the background and atmosphere, the domestic duties—all of these are familiar to him. He has only to picture his own home, to imagine his mother, wife or sisters, and the whole scene becomes vivid and real. But to us the Hindu social structure (particularly of fifty years ago) is a world which has no key in our experience, and thus the writer's task of presenting a living, flesh and blood character against this foreign background is a hard one, for the writer must do all the work. The western reader cannot help much! And it was a living, flesh and blood character whom I was trying to extract from all I read about Mother—someone towards whom I could feel drawn instinctively, someone whom I could at least picture in my mind.

What exactly did I glean from what I read about Holy Mother? Her purity, her compassion, her tolerance, her all-embracing love —these qualities were mentioned repeatedly. But to me she remained a very remote figure. That she was the embodiment of these ideals

(*continued from the previous page*)

left, was transmuted into a delicate transparent bowl, the receptacle of Prema. And it is That which emanates from it, what strikes me. It is That which reflects from her simple words, it is That which causes her infallible decisions and the authority of her leadership and the spiritual power of the Guru, and it is the Divine love in the mild reflection of her motherhood. It is That which is said, 'to be beyond the reach of human mind and speech.'

It is That what strikes me in Holy Mother.

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I never questioned, but such generalisations were powerless to evoke any response in me. I was looking for a human being whom I could understand and love, but I could not love an abstraction. To me she was a principle, not a person.

Let me deviate for a moment on the subject of incarnations in general. To me it seems that an incarnation has three aspects, first his divine personality, then his teaching and lastly his mundane daily existence. This last is important for the devotee, since it is through knowing the incarnation's reactions as a human being to daily existence that the Ideal becomes more living and real. In short, the incarnation must be a three-dimensional character. In reading about Mother, I was unable to fill in the third dimension.

I had experienced no such difficulties when I first read about Sri Ramakrishna. He made an immediate appeal, primarily as a lovable, enchanting personality. Even during my first reading of the Gospel I responded to his delightfully human qualities—his outspokenness, his robust sense of humour, his sound common sense, his warmth—as revealed in the little everyday incidents in his life. Mother needed to be humanized in exactly this way before she could attract me; she remained too much of a shadow, dim paragon of all the virtues. And her recorded conversations, confined as they are for the most part to spiritual advice—and what wonderful advice it is—did not help me much towards visualizing her as a person.

Sri Ramakrishna had his Boswell in M. There was no such talented reporter near Holy Mother. I decided that my quest for the key to her personality through the pages of a book was doomed to be fruitless. I arrived at the conclusion that she was probably one of those great silent souls whom one had to meet personally in order to appreciate. She simply could not be communicated on paper. How often had I read 'One could feel her spirituality' and 'One felt uplifted in her presence' or 'One had only to be in the same room with her, without even exchanging a word, for all one's anxieties to disappear' or 'To know her was to love her.' And so on and so on. Well, I had not known her, and therefore, I thought to myself, she would always remain for me a wooden, lifeless figure. So I made up my mind to forget about her, and for two years I never gave even a passing thought to Holy Mother.

But evidently my interest and curiosity had not wholly died down. They must have been lying dormant, ready to be stirred up again should the right stimulus appear—which it did when I arrived in Calcutta and met a few people who had been Holy Mother's disciples, and as I talked with them I realised that some amongst these had known her very intimately and had actually lived with her. This was the chance I had been waiting for! Perhaps, I thought, these people in telling me what they remembered of Mother, could make her live for me in the same way that Sri Ramakrishna lives through the pages of the Gospel. And with this hope in mind, I mercilessly plied them with questions about the minutest, seemingly insignificant details of her behaviour.

I wanted to know the pitch of her voice, did she speak fast or slowly, did she smile or laugh much, what did she say to a devotee as he entered the room and so on. Sometimes getting even a brief answer to these questions was like extracting a tooth, but occasionally my victim would be stimulated to tell me some anecdote about Mother, interesting, moving, or amusing as the case might be, which revealed to me a hitherto unsuspected side to her personality and which helped me to build up a mental picture of a human being.

Before discussing more fully the nature of my conversations with those disciples of Holy Mother who were kind enough to talk with me, let me try to analyse why it is that so many western devotees are spontaneously drawn to Sri Ramakrishna as he is presented in the Gospel, in spite of the fact that his customs, background and general outlook and behaviour appear so strange to us and even bewildering. Why do we find Sri Ramakrishna such a lovable fellow? The explana-

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tion lies, I think, in the talent of his Boswell. M. possessed the dramatist's instinct to a remarkable degree; he knew how to reveal character through a casual, even trivial remark, he had an eye for a telling scene that by any less acute observer would have been dismissed as of no account. Sri Ramakrishna lives for us through the verbatim reports of what he said, and how vividly he 'comes over!' Why? Because during the course of his varied conversation he expresses, at one time or another, the whole gamut of human emotions—and naturally this must evoke a response in us, human readers. Sorrow, wit, childlike merriment, his gentle teasing, his sharp repartee, his disappointments, his hopes, his love and affection towards those around him, his shrewd and seemingly cynical comments on human conduct, his merciless debunking of pretentiousness. And all of this irrespective of his lofty teaching on spiritual matters. Who could fail to be touched and amused by this lovable man, who never goes out visiting without taking his little spice-bag with him; and who is so eager to see the sights as his carriage drives through the streets of Calcutta that he keeps sticking his head out of the window, first on one side, then on the other until suddenly, sinking back in his seat, he says abruptly: 'I'm thirsty. What's to be done?' And again, when his arm is broken, he naively complains to everyone and cries like a child and wants to be reassured time and again that it will be mended! Such incidents may not teach us anything, but they bring us closer to the Master.

Let me remind the reader of further examples. There is the day on which the argumentative Hazra is giving orders and throwing his weight about in front of a newcomer who, observing the scene, naively says to him, 'You must have learnt much wisdom from him' (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) and the Master cuts in at once with 'No, he has been wise like this from his boyhood!' Or the remark to the Doctor who was attending his broken arm and assuring him that in time it would mend and the pain would go, 'I haven't very much faith in your Calcutta physicians,' the Master says, 'when Sambhu became delirious Dr. Sarvadhikari said: "Oh, it is nothing. It is just grogginess from the medicine." And a little while after Sambhu breathed his last!'

These and many other delightful dialogues are of incalculable value to me when I try to imagine Sri Ramakrishna. He lives on the printed page, whereas Holy Mother never does, for me, at any rate. And to this day had I not met the Bengali ladies and gentlemen who related to me similar trivial incidents in Mother's life, she would have remained a vague character, beyond my conception and outside my affections. As it is, I now realise that Mother had a sense of humour, that she could be surprisingly naive in her dealings with certain people, that she had prejudices which she could not overcome!

In illustration of this last point, here is a charming story. Sister Nivedita had a small pet dog of which she was very fond. One day she brought the dog with her to visit Mother. Nivedita wanted Mother to take the dog on her lap and fondle it. But Mother, like most orthodox Brahmin ladies, though she could feel compassion for animals, was nevertheless reluctant to touch them. So she declined to stroke Nivedita's dog. Nivedita said to her: 'Mother, in the West we have a saying "Love me, love my dog." So if you really love me, you must love this animal too.' 'Oh, but I do love you, Nivedita,' protested Mother vehemently, 'Believe me, I do love you!'

And another animal story. When Mother was staying at Jayrambati on one occasion, there was a particularly troublesome cat who sneaked into the kitchen repeatedly and stole food. So one day a disciple, thinking she was doing everyone a good turn, picked up the guilty cat and threw it bodily out of the compound. Mother was in tears at seeing the harsh treatment the cat received, and when it did not return for several days, Mother was on the lookout for it with food ready. She was worried that it might starve to death. 'After all,' Mother said, 'why should we condemn the cat for stealing food? It's in his nature to steal—and now that we've driven him away how will he survive? He cannot work

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for his living.' And when finally the cat returned Mother was not only relieved to see him, but actually glad!

So many delightful pictures of Mother were painted for me. Mother taking the young wife of one of her householder disciples onto the roof of the house and secretly feeding her with sweets, begging the girl to keep the incident a secret from the other ladies so that they would not be jealous. And how did Mother behave towards a young school-teacher who on his day off walked twenty-five miles to see her? She fanned him for half an hour, then served him a huge meal that she had prepared, waiting on him personally. And when it was time for him to leave and walk the twenty-five miles back home, she accompanied him to the edge of the village and stood watching him stride across the fields for nearly an hour till he was out of sight.

Then once a disciple said to her, 'Mother, you are like Mother Kali Herself.' 'Oh, don't say that!' replied Mother, 'For if it were true I would have to stand like this all the time.' And Mother struck an attitude, sticking out her tongue! Then there is the story Mother told a disciple about herself and Sri Ramakrishna. With Hriday they were passing through Kamarpukur. The Master went to his old home and inspected the premises, as he always did when visiting his village. He was displeased to find that the cooking-house was in a state of dilapidation, and scolded Hriday for allowing the place to run to rack and ruin, ordering him to get it repaired at once. Mother, distressed by this scene, turned to Sri Ramakrishna and said: 'You only come to Kamarpukur to complain and then go away again. You're very selfish.' 'Yes,' the Master retorted, 'I am selfish, but it is not love of the little self, but of the universal Self.' 'And then,' Mother added in a tone of mild astonishment, 'Thakur stood there and gave me half an hour's lecture on Vedanta!'

How Mother loved her disciples. Once she blessed one by saying 'May happiness and sorrow pass under your feet as water under a bridge.' Yet she could not herself remain indifferent to or unmoved by their sorrows. A householder came to her and said that his young wife had died suddenly. Mother burst into tears, and turning to Yogin-Ma said 'Oh, Yogin, my daughter-in-law is dead.' Then Mother sat in front of the Master's photograph and prayed thus through her tears: 'Thakur, don't let my daughter-in-law be born again—give her a place at your feet forever. Don't let her take another body.'

And so many other fascinating stories I heard, but there is not space enough to quote them all. It is through these anecdotes that I have begun to understand Holy Mother a little and to find a place for her in my heart.

Here the reader may raise a pertinent question as to why I should occupy myself with such trivial matters when obviously the most important aspect of Holy Mother is her teaching. That is true. But many of us, and I for one, are more likely to be attracted first by the human, lovable side of a great soul and to his or her teaching afterwards. After all, what is the point of repeated incarnations? From age to age, as they appear, they give the eternal truth a contemporary relevance, not only in what they say, but in what they do. To incarnate means to take a body. Therefore their behaviour, as embodied human beings, cannot be without significance for us. No detail of an Incarnation's daily behaviour is without value if, through knowing about it, the devotee gets a clearer picture of his Ideal as a person and feels closer to Him. And this personal touch, as revealed in the incidents quoted above, is exactly what some of us need, particularly in the early stages of our spiritual life. Without knowledge of our Chosen Ideal's traits and idiosyncrasies we find it hard to imagine Him as living and real. He must be individualized.

Let me quote Swami Vivekananda: 'As I grow older I look more and more for greatness in little things. I want to know what a great man eats and wears, and how he speaks to his servants...'. This is so true—what conception can one form of, say, Mahatma Gandhi as a person, if we merely read that he was brave and clever and high-minded, that he believed in *ahimsa* and *brahmacharya*, and that from

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IDEALLY PERFECT

Gwendolyn Thomas

In the center of downtown Manhattan just off Fifth Avenue there dwells an order of cloistered nuns living a life of constant adoration and reparation, identifying themselves with the Virgin Mary and imitating Her life and ideal. On Christmas Eve in the public chapel of these nuns there sat a Vedanta student among the rest to witness the Midnight Mass. It seemed to her that this special worship of Jesus Christ was meant for Sri Ramakrishna and these prayers to Mary for Holy Mother. And as the chant goes on, 'Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.' — does it not seem that all these Hail Mary's are meant for her, for Mother Sarada? She is our Blessed Virgin. And is it not but her play that she wears the guise of Mary, Mother of Jesus, and again that of Sri Sarada Devi, the Divine Spouse of Sri Ramakrishna? One is reminded of the question which she herself put to Sri Ramakrishna, 'How do you regard me?', and of his answer, 'The Mother who gave birth to this body, the Mother who is worshipped in the temple, and she who is massaging my feet are one and the same.'

* * *

With all her vastness and the many-sidedness of her personality, is it any wonder that the Holy Mother has made her appeal in the West, that she has found her way into our hearts and minds and has become our ideal? Just what are the qualities which so endear her to us? On the one hand we find in her the perfect example of gentleness, humility, purity, patience, and self-dedication; while on the other hand there is great liberal-mindedness, common sense, boldness, fearlessness, and strength. The quiet aspect of her personality is more apparent, while the bold side remains more hidden. Perhaps for this reason her modesty and self-effacement are emphasized; whereas her fearlessness and strength are passed over more lightly. However, one cannot consider the parts without the whole, for it is in the harmonious blending of both these aspects of her personality that she is the perfect ideal. If we examine her life from any one view-point, we find only the culmination of perfection.

It has been said that she is the perfect wife, the perfect nun, the perfect mother and the perfect teacher all in one, and is therefore, 'the historical fulfilment of the Madonna ideal'. Much has been said about the Holy Mother as the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, but very little emphasis has been given to the nun aspect of her life. When she is considered as the perfect wife, we in the West cannot always appreciate that ideal

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being an unsuccessful small-town lawyer he rose to such heights that by his countrymen he was proclaimed the Father of the Nation?

So I beg the reader not to think that in seeking out these small details and emphasising them I am trying to drag Holy Mother down to my own level; that in attaching importance to her commonplace remarks I am ignoring her spiritual greatness. Her teaching I accept, her divinity I no longer question. My sole desire has been to find out as much as possible about Holy Mother and thus develop some devotion for her. That I have been able even to make some beginning in the right direction and to acquire some understanding of her I owe to those disciples of Holy Mother, some monastics, others householders, who were gracious enough to recall to mind for my benefit various incidents in her life which they had personally witnessed. I shall never cease to be grateful for this blessed privilege. I now have something to build on. Mother now begins to live in my mind and heart. And I am still groping my way towards a deeper understanding.

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since it stresses the so-called passive virtues (i.e. modesty, shyness, self-effacement, etc.). Because the West places emphasis on the external rather than the internal and idealizes extroversion rather than introversion, we prefer to manifest the so-called active virtues (i.e. boldness, fearlessness, strength, etc.). Thus we have a misconception of the passive virtues which we associate with a 'wishy-washy' shrinking violet in regards to the wife ideal. However, when we consider these same qualities in the light of the nun ideal, the association does not stand. Why is this? Since we have no Sita in our western tradition, no saint who has lived the highest ideal of wifehood, we do not easily connect wifehood and sainthood. It is difficult for us to connect the dynamic spiritual strength and utter fearlessness of a saint with these passive virtues in the case of the wife, but we have no trouble making this association with regards to the nun since all of our well known women saints were nuns. As a perfect wife we find that in the Holy Mother these softer qualities are no longer passive but dynamic, like an overpowering silence, since they are coupled with the reservoir of spiritual strength.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps easier for us to understand and appreciate certain aspects of the Holy Mother's life when considered from the standpoint of the nun rather than the wife. As a wife, it pains us that she had to go to so much trouble not to be seen and was put, therefore, to so much inconvenience. We feel it unjust that, in order to hear the devotional singing and watch the *sankirtan* in Sri Ramakrishna's room, she was obliged to make small peek holes in her bamboo screen at the Nahabat and look on from a distance. However, if we consider her as a cloistered nun, then these things are not only understandable but we can embrace that ideal of complete immolation. Consequently, the nun aspect of her life holds great significance for us. It is particularly important that in the later years of Mother's life she was surrounded by women disciples who lived with her as a community of nuns, to practical purposes, even though no monastic organization was formed nor did she change her status as householder. Her activities as a teacher, and in her early years those of a disciple, her daily routine of early rising, combining work and spiritual practices, and generally her secluded mode of living, all fit our conception of a nun much better than that of a wife.

Notwithstanding, these two ideals of a perfect wife and a perfect nun are similar as ideals. The same balance of saintly qualities are required of both. The divergence lies in the adjustment to the ideal in practice, but discrepancies in practice do not concern us here. Since the concept of Indian wifehood seems to differ so much from that of the West, is it possible for us to accept an exemplifier of the Indian ideal as our ideal? Do we not find that the same virtues of purity, patience, devotion, dedication, etc., are endorsed by both East and West? The westerner stresses the co-partnership of husband and wife, but we find in Holy Mother the highest example of co-partner and helpmate. The Shodasi Puja performed by Sri Ramakrishna bears testimony to this partnership as does her work as spiritual teacher and successor to the Master in her later life.

The idea of self-dedication also exists in the western concept of wifely perfection. If we study the lives of celebrated men, we find that women have played a great and silent part in the unfoldment of the greatness of those men. There are many unsung tales of devotion and heroism. It is true that we have had many great and heroic women, but we have not had example of a Sita or a Holy Mother to follow. One may say however, that we have a 'western Sati' in the form of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, which is true, but it is Her motherhood and nunhood that are given emphasis and not her wifehood. Consequently, the ideal of a perfect wife has not been clearly defined in our mind, and the concept of self-dedication in relation to the wife has not reached the peak of its development here as it has in India; that of

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worship or dedication to God through service to the husband.

The idea of obedience to the husband, which is repugnant to a western woman since it implies subservience as opposed to co-partnership, seems to be an outgrowth of the idea of obedience to the guru. Since, in the Indian tradition, the husband was charged with the education of the wife, and the wife was often many years younger than the husband one can understand the dual role that he played. But for our purpose, if we of the West consign that idea to the nun ideal, it will no longer disturb us. Inasmuch as we have not had before us in the West the perfect saint and wife combined in one individual. The Holy Mother, therefore, fills a unique place and a definite need for us. Thus we see that she embodies all of our requirements of the ideal wife as well as the ideal nun, and much more.

Nonetheless, as the personification of the ideal of motherhood, her praises are most extolled, for the mother is her dominant role; but the mother and world teacher in her are inextricably connected. Her great liberal-mindedness and boldness are particularly revealed in the case of Sister Nivedita. It is very significant and wonderful for us that she allowed Nivedita to live with her even in the face of opposition from the other orthodox women, for if she had not done that we could not fully accept her as our ideal. Her all-embracing motherly love manifests itself in her remark, referring to westerners, that they too are also her children. We stand in amazement that, though she lived such a secluded and outwardly orthodox life, she could have such innate understanding and appreciation of occidental religious culture. This is demonstrated by her response to the Easter hymns, sung to her by Sisters Nivedita and Christine, and the western marriage vow, which drew from her the exclamation,

'Oh, the dharmmi words!'

The Holy Mother's supremacy as a world teacher is indisputable, for Sri Ramakrishna himself said that he left her to finish his work and that her mission was to manifest the Motherhood of God. Her Divine Motherhood was revealed early in her life when the Master sent one of his own disciples to take initiation from her during his lifetime. Also noteworthy is the charming incident when he scolds her for feeding the disciple too much and says, 'Who will take care of his spiritual life, will you?' and she quietly replies, 'Yes, I will.' These instances stand as a prelude to her future position as loving Mother and Refuge to all and sundry who came to her. She was so humble and self-effacing that she gave all credit to the Master taking none for herself, but those moments when she revealed herself to her disciples are most thrilling. Once a disciple had anxiety about his spiritual practices and complained that he couldn't do them, and she told him to have no fear since he had taken refuge in her. In answer to the questioning of another, she admitted that she also takes care of the lower animals. Furthermore, that she did so much japam for her disciples reveals the Divine Mother looking after her myriads of children.

One delightful incident which touches the heart occurred in South India when Mother visited Swami Ramakrishnananda. He took her riding in an early model open automobile and wet his chaddar to wash the leather seat so that it wouldn't be too hot for her. But best of all, this Swami, who was very orthodox and meticulous about the details of ritual, used the Master's puja dishes to serve her food. This tribute is second only to that of Sri Ramakrishna himself when he said regarding her, 'Crores of Ramas and Krishnas have been created by the Maya of Radha.' Sri Ramakrishna alone could fully appreciate her worth, and, later, his great disciples who trembled in her presence, alone really knew her.

The meaning for women of the Holy Mother's life cannot be overestimated. She is the torch bearer for the cause of women everywhere. The historical proximity of her life is of great importance since it proves the reality of the lives of all previous Satis and the validity of the Madonna ideal in modern times. That she fills our need, particularly in the West, for one who has lived

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MOGRA FLOWER

Marion Code ('Mukti')

'Sarada Devi'—the gentle Bengali voice lingered on a high note. The song had been a simple sort of reminiscence of the saintly soul 'to whose feet devotees come even from America', whose spirit is increasingly strong among us here in India.

All during the many centennial celebrations, the speeches, the memorial articles, I have felt an ongoing spirit much more potent than centennial memorials are usually able to invoke. Here was a living presence of which I had been only dimly aware as an integral part of the still living life of Sri Ramakrishna. But what was this life which still had power to draw thousands to her feet, men as well as women, from all over India? What was this power felt as poignantly in 'The Mother's House' in Calcutta as the spirit of her God-man is felt in the little room at Dakshineswar?

Coming from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States about a year ago, I have had rich opportunities to observe Indian womanhood; first in the suburb of Basavangudi, south of Bangalore, where I settled in an Indian house among the country people. My purpose was to get used to India gradually and continue my studies in Vedanta.

Sunrise worship on Temple Hill, where ancient Dravidian temples and images date back a thousand years, brought many country women with their burdens and their beasts. I loved the dignity and grace of their barefooted walk to the tank to fill shining water jars, that sometimes reflected the color of their bright or fading saris. I never quite got hardened to the fresh impact of beauty of that classical dress, adaptable to almost every sort of movement. To a western woman in shoes it seemed a miracle that a steep and rocky hillside could be ascended with such ease and grace; and the descent with full jar on head was even more miraculous.

Then at any hour of the day one might see women worshipping in one or another of the temples; the image of Hanuman, Ganesha or Basava, Siva or Krishna, or still more ancient shrines in honor of Naga, the serpent of fertility and symbol of creation—seemed not to matter so much as the fact that it was a holy place with chanting priest and flowers where one might pray at any hour to the invisible God within. At sunset they would gather in a temple court for reading and expounding of sacred texts,—as I was later to see them at Banaras.

Here were two elements interwoven: a peaceful acceptance of whatever labor was called for, and an undergirding of deeply felt religion that was real to them because it kept them in harmony with the forces in the universe around them. Consciously or unconsciously there is a partnership with God and the earth, a sense of life flowing interdependently without the greedy effort to dominate the earth that is so disastrously evident in the West.

In the little market town where people lived in family compounds one could see the mothers early in the morning sprinkling water on their door yards, marking carefully the

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(continued from the previous page)

that ideal cannot be regarded as too significant. The very fact that she manifested herself as a woman, is enough to lift up the whole of womankind the world over and to give them new hope, strength and confidence in their potentialities. As the all-loving Mother and the Teacher of teachers, her life is proof that women have the same spiritual potentialities as men, and that in their struggle to unfold these potentialities women should be given the same advantages and opportunities for the spiritual life as men. She renews for us the highest ideal of devotional life: that of pure and selfless dedication, self-sacrifice, and self-abnegation, thus reminding us that whether it be applied to the wife, the nun, the mother, or the teacher, the ideal is ever the same.

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mandala in white flour paste for the blessing of the threshold, a different design each day, and always accomplished at dawn long before fire and food were thought of. Later, children would be seen gathering stemless blossoms for the morning *puja*, sweeping the courtyards with twig brooms until they were as neat as any living-room. But always throughout each activity one felt the thought of God, a dedicating of the day with all its labor of living.

That lifelong beauty of faithfulness of the Holy Mother was not a unique phenomenon. It was primarily an intensification of a quality inherent in Indian womanhood, taught from the Vedas and carried on unchanged in these blessed country regions still untainted by materialism.

But what of the New India with its struggle for equality between the sexes, the demand for freedom and sharing of responsibility in public as well as in private life? It was time to set forth and observe other kinds of Indian living. Among the teachers in Sister Nivedita's School in Calcutta I met a highly educated type of young womanhood, leaders of the next generation of wives and mothers and public servants. Coming to them directly from long meditation in 'The Mother's House' I felt again how powerful is that spirit of Sarada Devi; tried again to analyze its components. As the Mogra flower in summer fills the surrounding air with all-pervading fragrance unique in itself, quite unlike any other flower and yet so white and small, so that life of prayer and dedication seems to fill every room in which she had ever lived, surround with special aura every man and woman who had ever talked with her and loved her. For to be in her presence was to love her.

Service to women with a special quality of grace and tenderness is the other half of Sri Ramakrishna's service to his apostles and devotees, and through them to devotees scattered all over the world. There is an effective power of intelligence that goes with selfless service; in the nurses at Ramakrishna Mission Hospitals; in the Kasturba Hospital of the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation, in many other institutions I have felt a *plus* of effectiveness that was somehow linked in my mind with what the Holy Mother had supremely. Tenderness in service may be as necessary an ingredient of teaching and healing as are knowledge and techniques.

What of the educated woman of leisure? After a United Nations Conference in New York I met a Brahmin lady who had defied caste to become one of the first women physicians in India, and she had important political affiliations in the new regime. When I reached India she invited me to visit her in a picturesque palace of an ex-Rajah where I met members of her family and was received as an honored guest with no sense of strangeness. This was part of the all-embracing acceptance of other faiths that marks the true Hindu culture. In that household I found religious observances which punctuated the day with reminders of God. One thought of God as light in the gesture of obeisance that always followed the lighting of the drawing-room lamp at twilight. Incidentally, I shall never forget that noble drawing-room opening onto a court filled with huge old orange trees. There was a platform of carved ebony upholstered in ivory damask on which my hostess sat 'lotuswise' in embroidered muslin sari, always of white. And she could converse fluently and wittily in English about philosophy or world affairs, differences in custom and the value of Vedic wisdom as opposed to psychology and meterialism without spiritual dedication. Again that beauty of faithfulness, the recurring golden thread in the Indian tapestry of womanhood.

In all the Indian households I was privileged to visit I found a courtesy and gentleness to one another, to servants and children, to visiting neighbors or tradesmen, which belongs to the *noblesse oblige* of real culture, and seems to be inherent in the Indian women's conception of running a house,—along with the quiet withdrawal of self which puts guests at their ease.

The devotion to the family and to religious observances evident on every economic level of life are quite remarkable. A charming

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young wife and mother of Delhi,—whose husband is an important Government official, who in the West would probably be called 'a Society woman'—has three young sons who seem to present no problems to their parents. They appear to be free and perfectly integrated, showing devotion to the family and interest in their studies. The mother too is peaceful, never too busy because her emotional life and energies are centred in her home. There is a focus there that reminds one of a 'burning glass' concentrating the sun's rays through a lens that kindles a fire straight from heaven.

When I think of a 'society woman' in the West I get a picture of vanity and restlessness, a rushing about in all sorts of activities and entertainments, the endless labor of keeping up elaborate establishments. Even on a simpler scale there is a compulsion to multiply *things*, a submission to the tyranny of things, which is unknown in the East. Often, to be sure, it is 'good works' with which the housewife is busied and wearied,—there are, perhaps not enough 'good work' engaged in by Indian housewives in their communities,—but what strikes the western visitor with ever repeated impact is the contrast in facial expression and demeanour. The Indian woman very often shows in her face both purity of heart and that peace of acceptance that is akin to the *ananda* of the Holy Men. One modern critic says: 'Not philosophic acceptance of their burdens and their slavery, but mere inertia, often anaemia; not "purity of heart" but abysmal ignorance.' Perhaps. So many states may be true. But many mothers I know in the West are more concerned about the bodies of their children than they are about their souls, or the control of their emotions. They seem not to care what movies they see or to what quality of minds they may be subjected in nurses or teachers. In the Eastern emphasis upon subordinating self in the evolution of the spirit there is a deeper and more beautiful quality of living, far more mature, controlled and purposeful than is evident with us.

Granted that there are tremendous lacks in India; a tremendous need for more and better education, particularly in the villages; better nutrition, hygiene, child care. These and many more problems need immediate attention in this painful transition period that India is now struggling through, but solutions are on the way, and the women of India are taking a large share in helping to find and implement a universal improvement.

But with all the westernization and technological improvement altars are being tended in order to maintain the best of the Vedic values which the western world may well learn from. The spirit of the Holy Mother pervades, like the fragrance of Mogra. If only we in the West would think less of the beauty, comfort and adornment of our bodies and our dwellings, much more of the nourishment of the spirit and a balanced harmony of living, there would be fewer restless neurotics among us, a higher standard of living in a truer sense. As observers have remarked before, the physical anaemia all too evident in India is not nearly so ominous as the spiritual anaemia of the West. It is because of the awareness of Dharma and living in relation to an Absolute, that life attains value for the individual.

It is a blessed thing for an American woman to live in India this year of the Holy Mother Centennial, haunted by that Bengali refrain: 'Sarada De*bi*.'

TEMPLE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

'When a photo of the Holy Mother was got made from an European firm, it was given to her for perusal. She took the photo with both hands, touched it with her head (by way of saluting it) and continued to look on. Much amused at this, I could suppress my laughter with great difficulty. "Whose photo is this, Mother?" I asked when she returned it. "Why—it is mine" said she like a simple small girl. As I laughed at this she asked, "Why do you laugh?" "It is your own photo and you salute it!" Mother too joined me in the laughter and said at last, "Even in this (meaning the photo) there is Sri Ramakrishna".'

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JUST WAITING FOR ME?

Charlotte Bose ('Sarala')

When first I heard about the Holy Mother from Swami Yatiswarananda in a Vedanta Centre in America, I became keenly interested. The more I read the more I wanted to know about her.

Who was this Holy Mother and how could I become acquainted with her and her ideal? I knew that her life was quiet and uneventful, but filled with profound peace, joy, tenderness and a great love and compassion for all.

I longed to meet some people who knew her intimately.

Then came my opportunity to visit India, the Motherland of spirituality. When in my travels about India, I reached Calcutta, my first desire was to visit Jayrambati, the birthplace of Holy Mother. Here I found a charming village completely unspoiled. When I was shown the Mother's room I was aware of the peace and calmness that was a very part of her. I stood in silence for sometime enjoying this holy atmosphere.

Next I was taken to the shrine which is built on the spot where Holy Mother was born. Here, as I sat before her picture, I could feel her presence.

In Dakshineswar I visited the Nahabat where Holy Mother lived. In the centre is a small shrine room surrounded by a narrow balcony, one section of which was set apart for her kitchen. I could hardly believe that in this small room with no windows and just a small door, Mother spent hours preparing various dishes for Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. I thought too of the times she peered through the curtain hoping to catch just a glimpse of the Master.

From Dakshineswar I was taken to Udbodhan, the Holy Mother's residence in Calcutta. After ascending a narrow staircase and passing through an open room over-looking a courtyard I found myself in Holy Mother's room. On the bed in which she slept was placed an unusually beautiful picture of Holy Mother draped in a sari.

I had the privilege of sitting before this picture and once again feeling the presence of this Divine Mother.

After the passing away of the Master, Holy Mother went on a pilgrimage to Brindavan. In this town as you wander through the small picturesque lanes you will see many temples associated with Sri Krishna. It was here that Holy Mother spent many hours in prayer and meditation. In the temple of Radharamana she prayed with tears in her eyes, 'Oh Lord, remove from me the habit of finding fault with others.' Once when her companion Golap-Ma was scolding a maid-servant, the Holy Mother asked the reason. Golap-Ma said, 'Mother, what is the use of telling you, when you cannot see the defects of others?' In a gentle voice Holy Mother replied, 'Well, Golap there is no dearth of people who see the faults of others. The world will not come to a standstill if I am differently constituted.'

While in Brindavan I also visited the temple in Kalababu's Kunj. It was here that Holy Mother had a room where she lived for many months. Nearby flows the Jamuna river where Holy Mother bathed and along whose sandy beaches she took solitary walks.

While in Calcutta, my desire to meet some people who knew Holy Mother intimately, was fulfilled. Here I met a dear couple who had been initiated by the Holy Mother. The husband was initiated in 1907. I requested him to tell me something about the Mother. He became very still and I waited, intently watching his face. As he thought of her a beautiful smile appeared and a lovely light appeared in his eyes. Slowly he started to speak—'Shortly after the birth of my first child I expressed a desire to Mother to leave the world and live the life of a sannyasin. Mother refused saying, "If you all become sannyasins to whom shall we go for support? What fear do you have? Remember that I am here and there is no fear." Then she touched my chest gently and I felt a thrilling sensation through my body; my feet trembled and I could not speak. I simply sat in

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silence for some time. Shortly after this I dreamed that Holy Mother came to me and said, "Why are you so concerned about living in this world? This is my wish and this will be done." After this my troubles were ended for I knew when it was the will of the Mother I had nothing to do in the matter. I knew that She had the power to do everything.' After a pause he continued, 'One day a brother disciple of mine said to Holy Mother, "Mother, I have not understood anything about you," to which Mother answered, "You need not know all of these things, just continue in your meditation." '

The husband continued his conversation—'One day on my way to see Holy Mother, my clothing became slightly soiled and I thought in my mind that I should not touch the feet of the Mother, so I bowed to her from a little distance. She immediately touched my head with her feet. When I looked up she was smiling and I too smiled!'

One day a devotee asked Mother, 'How shall I worship Thakur (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) and you?' 'Know that Thakur and I are one. When you worship one you worship the other also,' replied the Holy Mother.

Once a man of loose character came to Udbodhan to see Holy Mother, but was not allowed to enter the house. Mother learned of this and called him in and gave him a *mantra*. When the sannyasins suggested she should not have done this, Mother answered, 'You have nothing to interfere with in this matter. I can do as I wish.'

When a prostitute came to the threshold of Udbodhan and was detained at the door, Mother herself went and taking the woman by the hand, gently led her into the house and requested her to touch her feet. The woman said, 'I am a sinner, I am not fit to touch your feet'. But Mother made her touch her feet and then gave her a mantra and blessed her. To the objections of the sannyasins she queried,

'Where will she go if I do not bless her?'

Sometime after the husband had been initiated, his wife noticed that everyday before leaving the house, he took a letter from his pocket and read it. Being curious, she decided to find out the contents of this letter. To her surprise she found it was from the Holy Mother.

That very day she went to M. the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and inquired if women also could be initiated. Delighted to learn that they could, she was told by M. to take her young son along, as he knew the way having gone so frequently with his father to Udbodhan. The Mother was waiting for her at the door with raised hands and said, 'Come in.'

Some days passed before the wife was initiated. In the meantime she had a dream in which the Holy Mother appeared on the shore of a river. At about 4 a.m. she requested the wife to bathe and take the name of her *Ishta*. 'But I have no Ishta, how can I take His name?' said the wife, whereupon the Holy Mother then gave her the name to utter...

A few days later she went to Udbodhan for initiation. The Holy Mother being alone, took her in and closed the doors. Then she inquired, 'Have you ever received mantra in a dream?' The wife related her dream and Mother said, 'That is the mantra you are to utter.'

You can imagine my joy listening to these two dear people relating their reminiscences of the Holy Mother. The conversation came to a close and three of us sat in perfect silence for some time. I felt that I had truly been in the presence of the Holy Mother herself.

Suddenly the wife looking directly at me said, 'The Holy Mother knows your heart'. I was deeply touched and pondered—'If this is so, then she knows the heart of each and everyone of us.'

I am now convinced that the Holy Mother is a living presence and he who really seeks her, will surely find her.

The mind is rendered pure as the result of much austerities. 'God who is purity itself cannot be attained without austerities.'

HOLY MOTHER

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A PROMISE CONCEALED

Edle Alma Saxlund

After having read the book, *'The Life of Sarada Devi'* we learn that she was married to that well-known saintly figure Sri Ramakrishna—and we get a proof of how a woman driven by real devotion can ascend to become —not merely a wife—but also an associate and a spiritual help to a man, in their common search for Realisation of God.

We also see that Sarada Devi was able to take her husband's place after his death and that she did not live the life of 'a sad widow' but on the contrary was giving encouragement and advice to his devotees—considering her husband still to be with her—after he had cast off his physical body.

How free she was from the grip of narrow orthodoxy! Once a Brahmin woman, who was a cook, came to her at about nine o' clock in the evening and said :

'Mother, I have touched a dog. I must bathe.'

The Holy Mother said,

'It is now late in the evening. Don't bathe. It is enough to wash your hands and feet and change your clothes.'

The cook said :

'Oh! That won't do.'

The Mother replied :

'Then sprinkle some Ganges water on your body.'

That also did not satisfy the cook. At last the Mother said: *'Then touch Me.'* When dealing with devotees, she gave different advice to different persons. To one she advised marriage whereas to another not to marry—according to their different inclinations and fitness. The right thing—at the right place!

Indeed Saradadevi's life stands out as a shining example and it also conceals a promise for the future, not only for the Indian woman—but for women in general over the whole world in how far a woman may render useful work and contribute to the spiritual uplift of whole humanity.

A SUIT IN THE HIGH COURT

Swami Shivananda was then the Manager of the Belur Math. Brahmachari Nagen, the junior, did something awkward, owing to which his friends warned him that he would be turned out of the Math by the Swami. Frightened at this the Brahmachari at once left for Jayrambati without any notice and without even carrying a second cloth with him. When he reached the Mother's house in dirty robes and haggard look, none could imagine that he belonged to the Belur Math. As he revealed his identity the Mother gave him two pieces of cloth and a wrapper. She also had a letter written to Swami Shivananda to the effect, 'My dear son Tarak, the junior Nagen has offended you some way. Being afraid that you will turn him out of the Math, he has come to me walking the whole way on foot. As to that, my child, can a mother mind her son's offence? Don't, my boy, take any action against him.' She kept Nagen with her till the reply came. By the return post the reply came, 'We are freed from anxiety learning that younger Nagen is at your place. We, too, had been searching for his whereabouts. Kindly send him on; there is dearth of hands here for the worship. I shall not do anything by way of punishing him.' On receipt of the letter, Nagen went with the Mother's permission to Badanganj with Prabodh Babu, who gave him a couple of shirts and railway fare up to Belur. When he arrived there, Swami Shivananda held him fast in embrace and said, 'How now, my fellow! You went to the High Court to complain against me?'

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SRI SARADA DEVI, WOMEN AND SOCIAL SERVICE

Muthulakshmi Reddi

Part I

During the Centenary Celebration of Sri Saradamani Devi, commonly known as the Holy Mother, it would be of immense benefit to all to bring to our mind the many incidents in the Holy Mother's life, illustrative of her greatness and her divine nature. Nowadays, social service is being discussed and debated upon many a platform by statesmen, politicians secular and religious heads.

In the life of the Holy Mother, we find instances of disinterestedness and selfless service in many forms and types, to all people, irrespective of caste, creed or community. Her life is a typical example of how women can serve the family and the society. She was not only serving her divine husband but was also the servant of all the disciples and devotees of the Master.

Her patience with the members of her family and certain devotees, who never gave her rest even when she was indisposed, was something not attainable by any ordinary human being. Her courtesy and kindness and consideration to all, whether good or bad, have no comparison. Her forgiving nature was something divine which itself is an external manifestation of her high spiritual attainment. It is said that even the most wicked disciple felt that he was near and dear to her; that she had no eye to his failings; that there was no error too grievous for her forgiveness and that if he would but open his heart, her overflowing sympathy and assurances of divine protection would heal the wounds of his soul. When she was requested not to allow a certain young disciple to come to her presence on account of some misconduct on his part, she remarked,

> 'If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?'

Her very touch was enough to transform evil into good. When a woman who had led a bad life went to her in a mood of sincere repentance and made an unreserved confession of her sins, she embraced her with great warmth of feeling, uttering these words of assurance,

> 'Don't despair for all that you have done. You will get over all your sinful tendencies.'

A True Reformer

She was not only a spiritual reformer but a social reformer as well. Even today we find that the Hindu Society has not got rid of the wrong notions about caste and untouchability. But as far as half a century ago the Holy Mother, 'uneducated' as she was supposed to be, possessed the greatness of Mother love in herself so as to be free from all the narrow ideas, such as caste prejudice and caste distinction and treated the non-Hindus with the same affection and consideration as she treated the caste Hindu devotees. Once, a Muslim was served with meals in her house by Nalini, her niece. Owing to caste scruples, Nalini threw the various items of food on the plate from a distance. At this the Holy Mother was greatly sore at heart. Strongly disapproving of this action, the Holy Mother not only served the Muslim with meals herself but also cleaned that place after he had taken food. Can there be a better example to show her high level

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of thought which would not allow any consideration of race or caste in her sweep of universal love? In spite of her belonging to an age when caste etiquette was observed strictly, she never failed to break the bonds of caste consciousness when necessity arose.

It would be a matter of great joy for our readers to find that the Holy Mother did not always propagate marriage for girls. When a mother approached the Holy Mother to induce her daughter to marry, the Holy Mother replied,

> 'Is it not a misery to remain in lifelong slavery to another and always dance to his tune?'

She advised the mother that her daughter should not be forced to marry if she was not inclined to.

When a grown up girl belonging to an orthodox brahmin family was asked not to attend school, the Holy Mother, though she herself never attended school, replied promptly that education would make the girl useful not only to the family but also to the society.

When some of her relations asked one of the disciples to purchase cloth for the children during Durga Puja, he bought cloth of Indian make which the relations did not approve of. The disciple, out of patriotic feeling, asked why they wanted to buy foreign cloth. On hearing this, the Holy Mother remarked, 'The Westerners also are my children.' This reveals her broad-mindedness and love of humanity.

She was the peer of Sri Ramakrishna in point of renunciation. When somebody offered Rs. 10,000/- to Sri Ramakrishna as provision for his old age, he declined the offer but referred the gentleman to the Holy Mother. After knowing what Sri Ramakrishna had said to him, she replied, 'Even my taking the money would amount to Sri Ramakrishna's acceptance of this gift.' So she also declined the offer.

Another feature that singles out the Holy Mother from others of her sex is her conjugal life with her saintly husband. Young as she was, her mind never descended to the lower plane of thinking which is well-illustrated by the reply she gave to Sri Ramakrishna when he asked her 'Do you want to drag me into Maya?' The Holy Mother replied, 'I am here only to help you in your chosen path.' One could venture to say that without this purity of mind and thought of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna would not have been able to fulfil the mission of his life in the manner he did.

A Lover of Children

Her love of children showed itself in more ways than one. Not only did she bestow her love on Radhu, the orphan-niece who never gave the Holy Mother any peace of mind, but also treated the erring and indisciplined 'devotee children'—as she called them—with the same affection and care and offered prayers to Sri Ramakrishna for their redemption.

Everyone who went to her, received all her motherly attention and care and who were at times embarrassed by her action. Once when a baby of a lady-devotee soiled the carpet in her room, despite her protest, the Holy Mother insisted on cleaning the carpet herself.

Queen of Service

> 'She served the world and that is why she was a queen of service. Because she was a queen, she was also the servant of the least that needed her help and succour.'

She never hesitated to do menial service of any kind to comfort and heal the sick. Here's an example. Once when she was in

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Jayrambati, a cooly woman had to spend a night in her place. Early morning the Holy Mother found that the woman had high fever and had vomitted. At once she removed the vomitted matter and cleaned the room with water, before it came to the notice of others in the house and this spared the woman of scoldings from them.

Her disinterested love and compassion were not confined to her relations and disciples alone. The following example will tell us that her heart was also moved by the woes and sufferings of all around her. There was a woman, suffering from foul-smelling cancer of the ear, whom even her relations had discarded but the Holy Mother felt so much for the poor woman that her face was lit up only when the patient was taken to the nursing-ashram. This sympathy and love for others in distress were the chief characteristics of her nature. She always encouraged her disciples to co-operate in flood and famine relief operations and enquired them about the sufferings of the people and the extent of help given.

Gentle and patient as she was, she never could tolerate cruelty and injustice. When she heard the cries of a woman, who was beaten by her drunken husband, she ran to the portico and raising her voice asked the man to desist from beating her. The man immediately obeyed the Holy Mother. She was greatly provoked by the action of some police officials who after arresting two pregnant women made them walk to the Police Station which was a long distance off. Only after she heard that they were released could she set herself in peace. Her presence of mind in difficult situations and her courage were put to a severe test on one occasion. A mad man, while she was alone, pursued her trying to catch hold of her. She ran away from him but when the man approached her too near, when she could run no further she hurled him down and gave him a slap. Meanwhile others came to her rescue.

The Holy Mother was a perfect illustration of the manifold powers and virtues of humanity. She has manifested in her own life the qualities of the 'Triune of God, Lakshmi—the giver of happiness and prosperity; Saraswati—the embodiment of wisdom and Parvati—the Eternal Mother, Who uplifts the fallen, purifies the sinner, gives hopes to the despairing, strength to the weak, and courage to the coward, and recreates in man the divine energy' in the very words of our gifted sister, Sarojini Naidu of revered memory.

Part II

Women's Role in Society

It may be stated without any fear of contradiction that women's primary role in life is service—either service to the family or service to those that are in need of our help in our society. As a daughter, as a wife, as a mother and as a full citizen, she has her duties and her responsibilities. While the majority of our women are content with service to the family, a few have been able to extend their activities from the narrow circle of the family to the larger family, viz., the society and the nation.

Condition of Women in The Indian Society

Take for example the peculiar conditions of the Indian society. A large percentage of widows though once married have become homeless destitutes. Also another class of women whose number is daily becoming larger than that of the widows, is that of the deserted and neglected wives and mothers with children who seek admission into women's institutions. It is a deplorable fact that no remedy has

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yet been found to give relief to this class of humanity and to free them from the social and legal disabilities. There is still a third category, viz., unmarried adults whose parents are so poor, that they can neither give them education nor get them married and settle them in life, because of the high price those poor parents have to pay for the purchase of a bridegroom. Yet there are some men and women in our society who still believe that marriage is the chief end and aim of a woman's life and therefore all women should get married and confine their activities to the four walls of the house.

This kind of advice is all right for one who possesses a happy home and a loving husband with a decent income and rich parents. Everyone knows that majority of widows do not possess any home or any property to speak of and nowadays even near blood relations do not welcome these poor widows into their homes nor do they provide them with a shelter for their protection and other bare necessities of life. Under these conditions the widows are compelled and obliged to eke out their livelihood outside the circle of their relations in the wide world. If they are so fortunate enough to have some kind of education, while young, there is a chance for them to be trained later on in their lives with the help of existing charitable women's institutions for some independant and useful profession, viz., doctors, nurses, teachers, etc. But the lot of the elderly widows is really deplorable, especially when they are burdened with a number of children. They can be employed only as a menial on a pittance of Rs. 10/- or Rs. 15/- per mensem, as a cook or as a family help. Their sufferings and difficulties increase thousandfold when they are burdened with children as nobody would employ them with their children. So some of these women's institutions, that are still few, scattered here and there, chiefly in cities, have come to their help.

Quite a number of these widows employed as cooks and family helps in private families have admitted their children into the AVVAI HOME and similar such institutions. Only after they are relieved of their children, it is possible for them to find some employment in private families. Where are the facilities for these people to keep their children and look after them themselves? So also is the lot of deserted wives and mothers.

Will those political leaders who advise our young and educated women, in time and out of time, to marry and settle down and rest content with looking after husbands and children, find a remedy and suggest a solution for the disabilities and deplorable conditions of these thousands and lakhs of widows and deserted wives and mothers that wander about in search of food and shelter?

Some fathers are so unnatural and inhuman that very often they leave their wives and children to their fate and actually disappear out of sight. The Hindu marriage and inheritance laws work great hardship upon Hindu widows and wives. Therefore, there is no security in marriage for a Hindu woman especially when she becomes a widow or when her husband becomes disloyal to her. The only shelter and safety for her are the few institutions run for women by women themselves. We will quote the census figures: In India 12·8 per cent of the females are widows. There is one widow for every three married women in South India while the Indian ratio is nearly one to four (South India 14·3 per cent).

It is too well known to all of us in the city that there are thousands of abandoned children wandering about in the

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roads and thoroughfares. We are talking so much of child welfare, child health, child protection, child care, etc. from the platform. Who are the persons that could give a protective hand and loving care to these orphans? Who are the people that could run homes for widows? Who are the people best fitted to nurse the sick and the suffering and to reclaim the fallen and the delinquent? Who are those that could offer a compassionate look or words of solace to these stricken hearts? Is there anyone better fitted than women to play the role of a nurse, teacher and mother for these forlorn children, homeless and destitute widows and outcasted sisters, who very often are victims of double moral standard?

> 'There is no power in the world that could set any limitation to woman's achievements excepting woman herself and her own peculiar personal limitations.'

Woman as the Mother of the Family

Again, women are spoken of as the creators of the race and the mistresses of the household. She is also described as the '*Grihalakshmi*' in our mythology. This is certainly a true description of the mother in the home. She not only brings the children to life but also has the sacred responsibility of nursing the child to adolescence and educating the child to make him a good citizen. It is further admitted by all great men and women that mothers more than the fathers, are responsible for their greatness and goodness; for their name or fame in this world. So the woman who is to be a mother should have knowledge and enlightenment enough to be a good nurse and a good teacher to her child. To create a healthy and hygienic environment in the home, the family should be provided with a good housing, clean water supply, nutritious food, wholesome milk and healthy sanitary conditions.

The family is the unit, the country or the nation is composed of many such units. So the mother in the home ought to interest herself in the making of good laws and the formation of a good government.

Therefore, in the framing and shaping of the policy of the government, the women should have a share and a real voice. They should occupy an important place in the government of the country—in the departments of education, health, industry, etc. That is how women have entered public life and have struggled and secured equal political and civic rights in all the advanced countries of the world. That is why women have come to occupy an equal status in the new Indian Constitution with equal opportunities in all fields of service with men. Now, though few of our men public workers may say that women should confine themselves to the duties of a wife and a mother, the women's reply to them must be 'Can they guarantee good husbands, happy homes and economic status for every widow and for every unmarried poor girl and for every deserted wife?'

There are still only a handful of us who are educated, free and responsible and who strongly feel for the lot of our unfortunate sisters, steeped in ignorance and poverty and suffering from the social and legal disabilities and therefore have the courage to voice forth the grievances of these women.

Thanks to the lead of Gandhiji, the new Constitution of India has given women equal civic and political rights and equal opportunities and equal rights for entering any employment and post. Let the enlightened women of the land make use of these rights!

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We feel with a thrill of joy and pride that the prophecy of the great Spiritual Giant, Swami Vivekananda and the Divine Poet Subrahmania Bharati have come true. Bharati has said that women are born to create a new world order—to make a new set of laws and regulations in addition to their duties and responsibilities as daughter, wife or mother.

The Holy Mother's life is one such example. Swami Vivekananda has said,

> 'Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as anyone in the World.
>
> 'Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you?'

We cannot conclude this article without repeating here the call of our patriotic and gifted sister, Sarojini Naidu, in her own eloquent, inspiring address to the women:

The Work to be Done

'Is there not work to be done around you?' asked Mrs. Naidu.

> 'Are not the orphans crying for compassionate help? Does not the wail of the widow reach down the corridors of Time—not merely down the corridors of yesterday, but knocking upon the gates of today—saying through the ages, "Injustice has been done to us. Let your generation redeem us from the slavery of our position." Are not the illiterate women of this country calling out to you mutely, but nonetheless urgently, "Oh, our sisters, who are more fortunate than we, you who have either a blazing torch, or may be no more than a little flickering candle, in your hand, will you not help to lighten our darkness?"'

Are there not villages that need your counsel, your succour, your care and your guidance for the amelioration of their condition and satisfying their merest elementary needs? Are there not little children, with fathers and mothers indeed, but with no means whereby they could have the attention, physical, mental and spiritual that all children need?

SHE LIGHTENS OUR BURDEN

One day, in July, Swami Mahadevananda went to the market of Haldipukur at the Mother's bidding to purchase kerosene oil, flour, etc., weighing altogether more than eighty pounds. As the Mother had not asked him to engage any cooly, he carried the load on his own head. The road was slushy and slippery and the load seemed to become heavier at every step, till at last he could bear it no longer. Nevertheless he resolved not to yield to any weakness; and astonishingly enough, as he stepped forward with this determination and cleared a hurdle immediately in front, the burden became lighter enabling him to cover the remaining distance without any difficulty. But this sudden change naturally set him thinking about the mystery of it. And as he entered the Mother's house with that heavy load he found the Holy Mother pacing up and down the verandah with a flushed face and protruding eyes and saying to herself, 'Why, why, did I not ask him to engage a porter?' When Mahadevananda placed the burden down she said in anguish, 'You should have taken a porter. What did it matter if I had not asked you to do so? Should one go about that way?'

From: *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*

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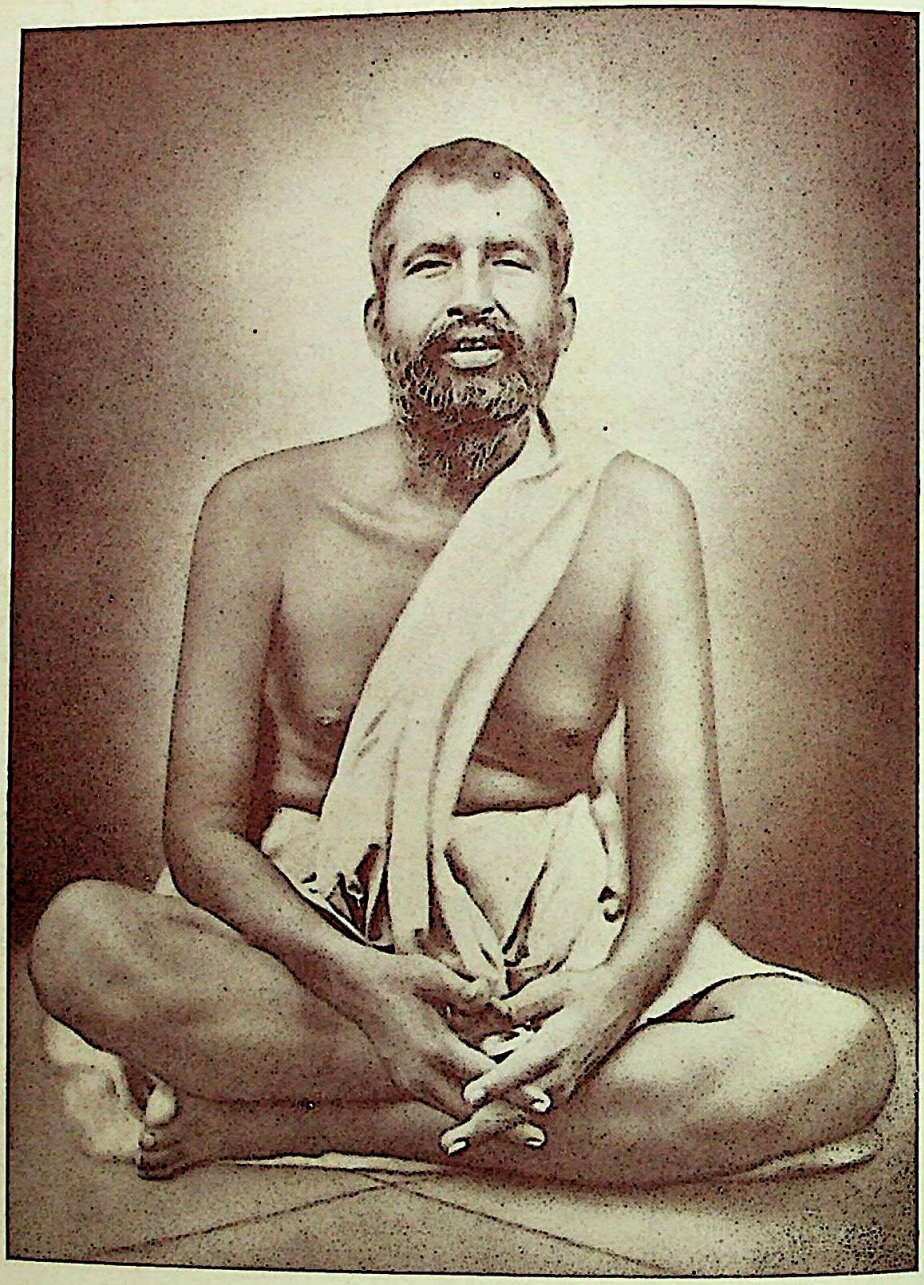

Sri Ramakrishna

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WOMANKIND THROUGH THE EYES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Vimalananda

It took me seven years to understand that Ramakrishna was not a holy man, but Holiness itself. He was the living embodiment of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the scriptures. He lived in one single life what not only the Hindu race, but the whole human race, lived spiritually for ages.

a. These words paint and point out to us the picture which Swami Vivekananda conceived about his great Master. The pronouncements of Sri Ramakrishna on the ideals and aspirations of womankind and his own attitude towards and services for them, therefore, have an importance which compels our attention at this juncture. The interest of Sri Ramakrishna was necessarily circumscribed to the area of religion; but to him religion was the air he breathed, the climate which made the seeds of good grow, the vision that steadied the steps of faltering humanity. Naturally, therefore, we expect and actually notice that his observations, findings, attitudes, and counsels on the nature and needs of womankind have an interest at times radiating beyond the limited frontiers of narrow religion. It may fairly be said that they give necessary knowledge of methods and principles, as well as inspiration and encouragement, needed for every woman to live a complete and consistent life as wife, mother, worker or teacher. The main concern of this paper is to colligate and appraise the views of this great guide, Sri Ramakrishna, on woman's role, as expressed in his printed utterances.

b. To live and act every man and woman must have some principles, beliefs and attitudes. The general teachings of great teachers of humanity are not meant exclusively for any particular biological group. Every seeker, man or woman, shares their teachings with immense advantage. The considerable body of literature that is preserved on Sri Ramakrishna is equally useful to the whole mankind directly or indirectly. Before we try to separate what is of special interest to womankind in his faith and philosophy, it is necessary to give the essence of his thoughts on which are based prescriptions suitable for individuals or separate groups. Life and teachings of sages are mutually complementary and illuminating; for, as they believe things to be, so they behave and act. The following epitomization[1] (which is only illustrative and not exhaustive) from the printed utterances of Sri Ramakrishna undoubtedly carry a stamp of his own and yet is built upon a summation of values seated in the cultural tradition and background of India.

c. According to Sri Ramakrishna, God is the only Eternal Substance; and the goal of human life is to have ecstatic love for God through prayer, self-surrender and other necessary spiritual disciplines. This great Master was never a reformer or an anti-traditionalist; but he exercised wonderful discrimination in separating the essential from the accidental. Calculating cleverness, intellectual astuteness, and logical curiosity found little favour with him. His synthetic, awakening, healing,

1. From the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Throughout this article page references are to the first edition of this work published by Ramakrishna Math, Madras in 1944.

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philosophy never encouraged critical acumen to widen the gap between heart and head in matters of faith and acceptance. In a hundred ways he brought home to the minds of his hearers the supreme need of faith and love, firm determination and stern resolve, grit and energy and an innate urge to go forward in the path of life. The prolixity of nature and variety in creation caused no wonder or anxiety in him. He noticed virtue and vice, meekness and ferocity, nectar and poison, existing side by side; but his focus of attention never strayed from the prior members of these contraries; and he never permitted his interlocuters too, to dwell on the negative side of life. To a certain Isan he advised to live in the world like an ant accepting only the sugar from a mixed heap of sugar and sand—the world too in the view of Sri Ramakrishna is a mixture of truth and untruth, sugar and sand. Once another visitor, called Jatindra, reminded him, in the course of a conversation, the story of righteous Yudhishthira who was fated to see hell before he was translated to Heaven. The Master sharply rebuked him at once thus: 'What sort of man are you? You don't remember his truthfulness, his forbearance, his patience, his discrimination, his dispassion, his devotion to God.' This is typical of his mind. He spoke from knowledge and conviction, and never thought of stripping away sanctions which culture of the past sought to attach to human behaviour and conduct; and on matters which he did not directly perceive he was contented with the mere citation of received opinions; and on these he was not dogmatic. He knew that controversies are raised only when guess against guess is held on to with learned pride. Sri Ramakrishna was an embodiment of divine humility and self-denial.

d. Sri Ramakrishna identified the Divine Reality designated as Brahman-Atman in the Upanishads with Sakti and addressed as Mother. In his conception there, however, existed no duality in the ultimate nature of the Divine Reality. Just as fire's power to burn implied fire itself, fire also implies its power to burn. God Himself is *Mahamaya*. Brahman and *Adyasakti*, Absolute and Relative, are but one. He reasoned that Brahman was addressed as Mother just because a mother is an object of great love, and because one is able to realize God just through love. He assured his hearers from his own example that God, the Universal Mother, will certainly reveal Herself to devotees who feel drawn to Her by the combined force of a worldly man's attraction for worldly possessions, a child's attraction for its mother, and a husband's attraction for his chaste wife. He was, however, not unaware of the Upanishadic tenet that the Ultimate Reality was not marked by sex; and he exemplified in his own life that God can be realized through all paths. Personally his attitude always remained that of the child towards the mother; and that supplied the keynote of his doctrines and the unique lesson which his life gives to all spiritual aspirants. One should propitiate the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy in order to obtain God. Sakti is the root of the universe, as it is Her illusion that conjures up the universe. Only when She lets her children pass they enter the inner chamber of Her Being. 'It is as if the Divine Mother said to the human mind in confidence with a sign from Her eye, "Go and

2. See *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, IV. 2-4 and V. 10. and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* page 216 where the following statement of the Laha reproduced with silent approval: 'I do not know whether Divine Mother is male or female.'

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enjoy the world.'' The mind can disentangle itself from worldliness if through Her grace She makes it turn towards Herself.

e. Sri Ramakrishna advised the generality of his visitors thus: there is nothing wrong in one's being in the world. But one must direct one's mind towards God. Let him do his duty with one hand and hold with the other to God. After the duty is over, let him hold to God with both the hands. We are born in this world to perform certain duties like work-people commuting into big cities from countryside to find employment and livelihood. The world is a thorny bush in which, before one has hardly freed oneself from one set of thorns, one finds oneself entangled in another. Good and bad tendencies are in human beings and each begets its own results. Love of God purifies mind, body and soul of a man. God has created evil tendencies to reveal the glory of the good all the more, and to give man an opportunity to conquer the senses and attain sainthood. It must be the duty of man and woman to seek good company, pray to God incessantly, and shut up the doors of sensual desires and renounce greed, passion, egotism and vanity. Spoiling for wealth and possessions and indulging in sensual appetites are the signs of ignorance. Compassion for others, love of God and spirit of renunciation are the true ornaments of man or woman. He who remembers death alone can do things worthy of life. Philanthropic activities are good if one can perform them in a selfless spirit renouncing egotism and attachment; such disinterested activities would purify the mind and develop love and devotion to God. People who carry to excess the giving of alms or the distributing of food among the poor, fall victims to the desire of acquiring name and fame.[3] Man cannot really help the world. God alone does that by putting love for their children in parents' hearts, by endowing the minds of men and women with compassion, and by giving moral and spiritual inclinations to them. The altruist is only doing good to himself. Let one cultivate the feeling that God alone is the Master and that the goal of life is not earning money, but the service of God. But endeavour to increase one's economic productivity in an honest way for the sake of maintaining a religious family is not to be neglected. Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to truth as a spiritual discipline. Children should be protected till they become mature and self-supporting and inducted to the spiritual heritage of the family with care. Spiritual practices are extremely necessary even to live well in this world. Sri Ramakrishna stressed on the duties of householders towards their wives and children; it is the duty of a householder to support his chaste wife and to attend to all her lawful needs. A worldly man is hemmed in with many difficulties. He can find sanctuary only in God. Worldly desires often make one a hypocrite. Only by clinging to God agonies of death can be averted. We see from his thoughts paraphrased here that the religion and philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna is simple, direct, and applicable to the practical condition of men and women leading the common life of the world.

f. Born in a pious poor family and brought up in idyllic surroundings as a child, Sri Ramakrishna was mixing affectionately with the boys and girls of his neighbourhood and sometimes impersonating the opposite sex with his innate innocency. His biographer records a mildly mischievous act of his which looms signifi-

3. *Gospel* p. 66

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cant in the light of his later life. As a teenager he with his companions was once sporting in the bathing ghat reserved for ladies in the Haldarpukur tank. To get rid of the nuisance one of the ladies told the sportive gang that 'Women must not be seen undressed,' and so they had better go to the men's ghat. Some boys left, but Sri Ramakrishna persisted to know what would happen if the prohibition was contravened. His mother on receiving complaints from the ladies concerned told child Gadadhar:

> 'It is true nothing will happen to you when you do that, only the women feel insulted. They are in no way different from me; and so if you insult them, it is the same as insulting me. In future don't do anything that would hurt their sense of honour. Is it right to wound their feelings as well as mine?'[4]

Never more did he indulge in such pranks. Swami Vivekananda once remarked: The worship of even one spark of Mother in our earthly mother leads to greatness.[5] Loyalty, affection and eagerness for service which child Ramakrishna had for his earthly mother exemplified this pre-eminently. His unequalled devotion for the Divine Mother was, in one sense, only his love for the earthly mother writ large across infinity.

g. As an unfolding spiritual genius, after adolescence, Sri Ramakrishna entered on his unparalleled religious adventure: the practice of different religious disciplines in order to realize the highest goal set up by each religion. His most outstanding preceptor in the early part of this period of intense spiritual endeavour was Yogeswari, a Brahmin lady of great sanctity with wide experience and profound scriptural erudition. Sri Ramakrishna at once recognized that sex is no disqualification to be a spiritual instructor; on the other hand in tune with his attitude towards the Divine Reality as child and Mother he perhaps found that a preceptor whom one could address as Mother was a great advantage in so far as such practice would invoke the purest of feelings towards the opposite sex. Again the marriage of Sri Ramakrishna is another outstanding episode of his life which gives us many significant glimpses into the make of his mind. His relation with Sri Sarada Devi was one of a tender husband, a solicitous teacher and a supremely competent spiritual preceptor; of one who had specially realized the Divine Mother in her physical embodiment and also of one, as a divinely commissioned teacher of humanity, interested in giving the necessary guidance and strength to his own *sahadharmini* to shoulder the responsibility of being a teacher and inspirer of religious aspirants seeking bliss and freedom from the bondage of recurring life and death. Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with Yogeswari Brahmani as preceptor and his sanctified spiritual companionship with and tutelage of Sri Sarada Devi alone will serve as pointers to raise the status of womanhood to the highest level, if they are looked upon as ideals that should guide mankind. The flower of spirituality fully blossomed in Sri Ramakrishna and as a consequence, like bees seeking nectar, men and women thronged to him for consolation, guidance and illumination. He was now compelled to have close relation with another group of women, the cream of pious womanhood. His frequent visit to devotees' houses at Calcutta and the presence of several visitors at the temple at Dakshineswar made it possible for him

4. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master.* p. 48. Madras, 1952.
5. *Inspired Talks.*

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to observe the ways of the common type of womankind also. As a ruralite he had studied the nature of men and women at Kamarpukur during his early life and also during sojourns in his native village in later years. What difficulty can there be for a mind whetted and cleansed by the intensest meditation to grasp the tendencies, inclinations and motives of men and women who came within the orbit of his influence?

(to be continued)

THE CONCEPTION OF SAKTI IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Roma Chaudhuri

Prologue

The conception of S'akti or Divine Power is a fundamental one in philosophy. The Divine Being is ordinarily conceived from four graduated standpoints: cosmological, moral, religious and philosophical. From the cosmological point of view, He is taken to be the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the Cosmos, the universe of souls and matter. From a higher moral point of view, He is not only the cause of the world of physical effects, as actually seen, but also the Ground and Foundation of Righteousness, the Moral Governor of the higher world of rational and moral beings, guiding them aright to the straight and narrow path of virtue, impartially dispensing justice to them according to their own works. From a still higher religious point of view, He is not only a Stern Guide and an Impersonal Judge, but also the nearest and the dearest object of love, devotion and worship—Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved all in one. Finally, from the highest point of view of Philosophy, He is not only an object of love, devotion and worship, somewhat different from the lover, the devotee and the worshipper—but also the Absolute, one and identical with the worshipper, when all duality between the knower and the known, the worshipper and the worshipped, the attainer and the object to be attained ceases completely, and is transcended by an all-embracing, all-absorbing Unity. The first three conceptions are monotheistic ones; the last, monistic. These two trends of thought, monotheistic and monistic, are found, in a greater or lesser degree, with differences in emphasis and importance, in many systems of the world—but specially in Indian Philosophy. The main difference between the two is as regards the conception of S'akti or Divine Attributes and Powers. From the monotheistic standpoint, God possesses numerous attributes and powers, and is, as such, Saguṇa, Savis'eṣa, Sakriya; and in creating the universe, in serving the end of Morality, in entering into a sweet, personal relationship with the devotee, He exercises a special S'akti in each case, as suitable. From the strictly monistic standpoint, however, the Absolute is conceived to be an Abstract Unity, Nirguṇa, Nirvis'eṣa Niṣkriya, without attributes and powers, differences and activities. Hence, it has been said that the main difference between the two main

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philosophical schools of thought is as regards the conception of S'akti or Divine Power.

Let us here attempt a brief survey of the conception of S'akti in Indian Philosophy throughout the ages.

S'AKTI IN THE VEDIC SAṂHITĀS

In the Ṛg-veda, the earliest literature in the world, as well-known, we find the apparently pluralistic conception of many Gods and Goddesses, underlying which, however, there is the undeniable monotheistic, even monistic, notion of a Supreme God whose manifestations are all these numerous other Deities, of the Absolute, who is not only the only God, but also the only Being, covering, including and absorbing everything. In this connection, we may refer to the celebrated Ṛg-vedic passage (I. 164. 46):

एकं सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति
अग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ।

The Real is One only. The wise call It variously as Agni, Yama, Mātaris'van (Vāyu).

The Vāmadevīya-Sūkta (4. 26), Puruṣa-sūkta (10.90), Vāk-Sūkta (10.125) by a female Seer Vāk, Prajāpati-Sūkta (10.121) and the like clearly bring to light the very high kind of Monism, propounded by our venerable Vedic sages right at the dawn of human civilization.

Thus, right from the time of the Ṛg-veda, which marks the beginning of all philosophical speculations in India as well as in the world, we find the exhilarating conception of a plurality of S'aktis or divine powers, as the manifestations of One, Supreme Divine Power. Thus here, first each God is conceived to have certain special 'functions', 'energies' or 'powers', called 'S'akti', or more often 'S'akī'. For example, in the Ṛg-veda, Agni is said to have three functions or energies, viz. heat-energy operating in the sacrificial fire, gastric fire, life, and vegetable growth; electric-energy operating in lightning; and solar-energy operating in the sun, dawn and planets. Tvaṣṭṛ is, similarly, said to be endowed with the creative energy in the womb, bringing about different types of creatures, and so on. Thus, in the Vedas, we find the beautiful conception of 'Ṛta' or Universal, Cosmic Order, manifested in the physical sphere as 'Laws of Nature', and in the mental sphere as 'Law of Karma'. That is, the Cosmos is an orderly whole, regulated by definite laws, physical and moral, and the plurality of Deities are but Divine Agencies, harmoniously working out this well-planned Cosmic System. Hence, in the Vedas there is the clear conception of the Unity of powers, as brought out beautifully, e.g. in a hymn to Varuṇa:

> 'O Varuna, Your Energy which works in the water in the 'Vaḍava' Agni, is the same that works in the heavens, in the sun, in the living creatures, in gastric fire and vital breath, in clouds, in lightning, in war-fields, in heroic hearts. Thus Your Energy is manifested in various, beautiful forms' (Ṛg-veda 4. 58. 11)

Hence, we find the general statement:

'महदेवानामसुरत्वमेकम्' (Ṛg-veda. 3. 55.)

'The powers of the Great Gods are one and the same'.

Thus, all the numerous S'aktis of the Deities are but the manifestations of the Supreme S'akti of the Supreme Deity.

At the first stage, in the Vedas, we find the conception of S'akti as a vivifying power, responsible for reproduction and fertilisation, both in the biological and philosophical senses, belonging to Gods, but not as a separate female principle of production. In the second stage, however, we meet with separate, female,

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productive consorts of Gods, called 'Gnās'. A fine example of this kind of transformation or elevation of the powers of Gods as separate Goddesses is found in the case of Indra and S'acī. Originally, the word 'S'acī' means only 'S'aktī' or a divine power belonging to a God, and that is why, Indra is described as 'S'acīpatiḥ', meaning the 'The Lord of Might'. But S'acī is also conceived as 'Devī Taviṣi' or 'Goddess of Might, Indra's Divine consort', or 'Female Counterpart of his Energy' (Ṛg-veda I. 56. 4). That is why, later on S'acī becomes the wife of Indra or Indrāṇī. Thus, in the Ṛg-veda, just as, the 'S'acīs' represent the Divine Powers of Gods, the 'Gnās' like Sarasvatī, Hotrā, Bhāratī, Varutrī, Dhīṣaṇā, Ilā, Puraṃdhi, Aramati, Āgnāyī, Indrāṇī, and Varuṇānī, are separate principles of 'female energy', acting in association with their 'male counterparts', and producing fertility and wealth. In this way, in the Vedas themselves, we find the conception of 'Divine Males' and 'Divine Females', co-operating for creation, later on fully developed in the S'akti-vāda of Vaiṣṇavism, S'aivaism, and S'āktaism.

S'AKTI IN THE BRĀHMAṆAS

In the Brāhmaṇas, the 'Gnās' of the Vedic Saṃhitās or hymns, are found to have an established place in rites and rituals as 'wives of Gods'. Thus, in rituals undertaken for increasing fertility and generative power, like the Aśvamedha, Patnīvatagraha, Patnīsaṃyāj, and similar sacrifices, they are associated with 'male energies' of fertilization represented by Agni, Tvaṣṭṛ, Soma and the rest.

In the Brāhmaṇas, however, a general tendency is noticed to bring the different kinds of 'Gnās' under one, supreme head, viz. Vāk. The reason for this is perhaps that in the Brāhmaṇas, fundamentally concerned with the proper performance of rites and rituals, accurate speech or correct pronunciation of Mantras, is of prime importance. Thus, in the Brāhmaṇas, the 'Gnās' are first identified with 'Chandas' or Vedic Metres, like Gāyatrī, Triṣṭubh, Jagatī and the like. (e.g. *S'atapatha Br.* 6. 5. 4. 7., *Taittirīya Br.* 5. 1. 7. 2.). But these metres, again, are not conceived to be mere arrangements of syllables, but to be endowed with creative forces or vital potencies, through which the Yajñas or sacrifices come to acquire special powers and are able to ensure success and victories for the Yajamānas or sacrificers. Thus e.g. in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, Gāyatrī is said to be 'Tejas' and 'Prāṇa', power and life energy, and so on. Then again, these Vedic metres are identified with Vāk in the Brāhmaṇas, like Taittirīya, Tāṇḍya and the like.

In the Ṛg-veda (10.125.), there is a superb hymn of a female Seer Vāk, and in this Vāk-sūkta, there is propounded a supreme kind of Monism. With firm conviction, she describes herself as the one, identical all-pervading principle of things, thus;

> 'He who eats food, does so through me
> He who sees, breathes, hears what is spoken, does so through me'.

This philosophical conception of unity and identity of all beings is developed in the Brāhmaṇas, where the ritualistic trend predominates, into the notion of a supreme female energy, responsible for procreation and production. That is why, in the Brāhmaṇas, the Ṛk, Sāman and Yajuṣ with all the mantras and various metres are taken to be the 'thousandfold progeny of Vak, and finally, Vāk becomes the S'akti of Prajāpati, the creator, uniting with him, as his wife, to

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produce the Gods and the universe. In this way, in the Brāhmaṇas, there is a gradual unification of the various Gods into one supreme God Prajāpati, and of the various Goddesses into one supreme Goddess Vāk; and as a result, there emerges the monotheistic idea of creation, not from particular Gods and Goddesses separately, but from a Supreme God: Brahmā or Prajāpati, with His consort or female Energy Vāk, she being but His own self. Thus, Prajāpati first creates or emits Vāk out of His own self, and then brings forth everything else through union with her.

(to be continued)

THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION'S WORK FOR WOMEN'S WELFARE

Swami Nityabodhananda

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission's solicitude for the material and spiritual advancement of women and its keen interest in works that promote their amelioration are manifest in the various types of institutions fostered by the Math and Mission, namely the Sister Nivedita Girls' School, Calcutta, the Sarada Vidyalaya, Madras, the Shishumangal Pratishthan and the Matri Bhavan in Calcutta, the Domiciliary Maternity and Baby Clinic, Jalpaiguri, the Women's section of the Hospital at Banares, and Rangoon, etc. Institutions at best are an index to human aspirations, a symbol of our ideology; and so we must look deep into the mind and soul of the Math and Mission Organization to know its faith and convictions in regard to women's programme and not simply to its institutions. These institutions have come up as a result of a regular programme of work accepted by the Math and Mission, a programme which had its sanction from Sri Ramakrishna himself. He allowed Sri Sarada Devi to stay at Dakshineswar and serve him and during this period he imparted to her instructions in spiritual and even in secular matters. He took great pains to make her efficient in both spiritual and secular affairs and finally vouchsafed unto her his spiritual treasures and entrusted to her his great mission at the close of his life. This really is the first act in the Mission's programme of women's welfare, and in all its work and ideology relating to women, the organization derives its guidance and inspiration from the Master's archetypal attitude to women in general and to Sarada Devi in particular. The Master looked upon all women whether of low or high spiritual calibre as shrines of the Divine and hence capable of climbing up to the pinnacle of human fulfilment. The above is the Math and Mission's testament of faith and with this as the anchor the Organization wants to help serve women in their varying stages of advancement by gifts of health, of knowledge and of spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda wanted Sri Sarada Devi's holiness and spiritual power to be made the rallying force for an order of dedicated women who will form the 'other' wing to the spiritual *militia* manned by

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his 'boys' so that both may march forward with the banner, '*Atmano Mokshartham Jagat-Hitaya Cha*'. There were women contemporaries of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples too who took to spiritual life; but no order was started then nor any institutions created, for social conditions at the time were insurmountable. Want of education among our women, their economic dependence, and early marriage were great impediments in the building up of a women's organization on lines similar to this Math and Mission. So Swami Vivekananda took the first step by asking Sister Nivedita to start a school for educating women. It was she, who embracing a life of 'renunciation and service' started on an intensive programme of women's welfare in strict accordance with the plans of Swami Vivekananda. She was the first to create an institution for women's education along national lines and the school was later on known after her.

The Sister Nivedita School: The school was opened by the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, on the Kali Puja day in November, 1898, in the presence of Swami Vivekananda and some of his brother disciples. It was then tentatively started and later on in 1902 was converted into a regular school. Since then it has grown slowly but steadily to be one of the best educational institutions in the country. It has a full-fledged High School, and an Industrial section and a residential or hostel section, known as the Sarada Mandir which has 30 inmates at present. The school is housed in artistically designed buildings in Northern Calcutta. The education imparted is on national lines with an eminent religious emphasis. It celebrated its Golden Jubilee in a very grand way in December, 1952.

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha: Under the management of this Ashrama, a Girls' School was started in 1927 which was recognized as a High School in 1948. Besides academic education, the girls are taught music, sewing, needlework, sports and physical culture. Attached to the School is a Hostel. In 1950 a Basic Primary School and a Residential Basic Training School for women were started and these institutions have won appreciation from the Educational Department of the Government.

The Shishumangal Pratishthan: The Pratishthan, one of the premier Hospitals managed by the Mission is an ideal home for ante-natal and post-natal care for mothers and children and for Hospital confinement. Started in 1932, it came up through various vicissitudes and today it has got up-to-date methods of treatment with 150 beds and a well-qualified medical staff. Housed in an imposing five-storied building on the Lansdowne Road of Calcutta, it is really the queen among the Mission's institutions for medical relief. An important feature of the Shishumangal Pratishthan is the facilities it provides to women of respectable families, particularly widows, for training in midwifery in a suitable healthy atmosphere. The institution has been recognized by the Bengal Nursing Council as a Training School for Midwives for the Senior and Junior Midwifery certificates.

The Matri Bhavan: Very similar to the Shishumangal Pratishthan in plan and purpose is the Matri Bhavan situated in Shri Mohan Lane, South Calcutta. It was started very recently in 1950 with ten beds in the Indoor Department and with an Outdoor Department for ante-natal care. Since January, 1952 the number of beds has been increased to 16. The Bhavan's speciality is that it is largely managed by the dedicated women workers of the Mission.

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Women's section of the Hospital at Banares: Attached to the Mission's Home of Service at Banares is the Women's section, started as early as 1918. It has since grown to great proportions and has now a Hospital section with 40 beds, a women workers' quarters and an Outdoor Department. There is also a Home for invalid women attached to this section. Started in 1912 in a building outside, it removed itself to its own premises in 1931 and a building with accommodation for 50 was put up in 1938. At present 19 invalids find shelter in this Home. It is worthy of mention that this section with its various departments is also managed by dedicated women workers.

Sri Sarada Vidyalaya, Madras: Coming South, prominent mention must be made of the Sarada Vidyalaya for girls in Tyagarayanagar, Madras. Started in the year 1921 in sheds in a very humble way it has grown to great proportions and greater popularity. It had a strength of 3,039 in January, 1953 and 3,129 in December. The Vidyalaya has got a Training School with two sections in the Secondary grade and three sections in the Elementary grade. It runs two hostels, one for the High School girls and the other for the Training School girls. The latter has got 75 inmates and the former 25. The special feature of Vidyalaya Schools is the attention given to the building up of the character of the pupils and the moral and religious instruction imparted to them. Efficient emphasis is also laid on the excercise and development of the artistic talents and social consciousness of the girl students.

The Sarada Mandir, Trichur and the Maternity Home, Trivandrum: Coming further South, mention must be made of the Sarada Mandir, Vilangans, Trichur, and the Maternity Hospital attached to the Trivandrum Ashrama as two important centres of the Math's work for women. Started in 1932 for giving shelter to two orphan girl students, the Sarada Mandir grew in plan and purpose. Some of the girl students of the High School run by the Math live in this Hostel section, the Sarada Mandir. At present there are 15 such inmates under the care of dedicated women workers. A new building was constructed and consecrated on Holy Mother's Birthday, in January, 1948. The Ramakrishna Gurukul, the parent institution, is unique in many ways and is the only one of its kind on the West Coast. So also to a large extent is the Sarada Mandir with its great aspiration for service to women.

Attached to the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trivandrum is a maternity hospital, and Child Welfare Centre. Started sometime in the year 1943 it grew up into a very useful and popular institution for ante-natal and post-natal care of mothers and for Hospital confinement. It has now thirty beds and has modern methods of treatment and a well-qualified staff. There is also a general section where general cases relating to women's diseases are attended to.

The gifts of knowledge, health and material needs administered to women through the Math and Mission Schools, hospitals and Nursing Homes are great gifts no doubt, but the gift of the higher life is the supreme gift as it would prepare the women to touch the feet of God and to cover themselves with the radiance of the Self. We have already referred earlier to Swami Vivekananda's idea of starting a Math where women desiring to dedicate their lives to the ideals of renunciation and service could live under the personal influence of Sri Sarada Devi and be inspired by her ideal of renunciation and

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service. But it took a long time before even the first step could be taken to realise this ideal. It was towards the end of 1914 that his brother disciple Swami Saradananda, the then General Secretary of the Organization, took steps and formed a nucleus of the Women's Math, as it were, as an annexe to the Nivedita School which, after the passing away of the Holy Mother was known as the Sarada Mandir. Since then it has been serving a very useful purpose as a Home for women who had dedicated themselves to the cause of women's education besides serving as a residential boarding house for students living away from their parents. Owing to the Swami's encouragement, another group of dedicated women workers was also formed at Banares in 1918 when a Women's Section of the Hospital was opened there. Later on in 1939 a third group formed itself at the Sarada Mandir, Vilangans, Trichur. Though such groups were formed at different places, the authorities of the Order felt that the time was not yet ripe to think in terms of a women's section or wing of this Organization, for there were only stray cases of aspirants seeking admission and these were accommodated in the women's institutions. One could however feel that this ideal of renunciation and service was slowly catching the imagination of girls with the spread of education among them and that they were being inspired by the ideal preached by Swamiji—

> 'For one's own salvation and for the good of the world.'

In 1946 the Headquarters of the Order made a conscious effort in this direction to feel the pulse by giving opportunities to educated girls who were inspired by this ideal to take to this life of renunciation and service. Since then many educated young women fresh from the universities and colleges have joined the Organization and are now staffing the institutions or sections of institutions meant wholly for women, such as the Sister Nivedita Girls' School and the Matribhavan of Calcutta, the Sarada Mandir, Trichur, and the women's section of the Banares hospital. In 1952, the Organization decided to take definite steps towards an independent and parallel women's organization as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda. With this end in view, in December, 1953, on the auspicious occasion of the Holy Mother's Birth Centenary, a few of the aspirants were initiated as Brahmacharinis who may in time be initiated into Sannyasa. Thus the foundation of a Women's Order was laid on this holy occasion. In America a nunnery had already been started at Santa Barbara, some sixty miles from Hollywood, under the supervision of Swami Prabhavananda, the Head of the Vedanta Centre in Hollywood. There are nine inmates, some of whom are also initiated Brahmacharinis.

As if to fulfil the wish expressed by Swami Vivekananda to one of his disciples, a site on the other side of the Ganges, some distance to the north of the Dakshineswar Temple, the place of Sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna, has been tentatively selected for a central nunnery, which in time may be the Headquarters of the women's Organization. We say tentatively, for sufficient funds are yet to be found for the purchase of the property. We hope through public co-operation, it will be accomplished during this Birth Centenary year of the Holy Mother, which comes to an end in December, 1954.

This institution—a Math for women aspirants—will be a fitting culmination of the Math and Mission Organization's work for the welfare of women, for it would

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help them to lead the highest kind of life prescribed by our Scriptures to human beings. Though marriage and motherhood are considered the normal paths for women, there sometimes comes a call to them too, as to men, to transcend this usual routine and gather unto themselves an abundance of the true spiritual life. All those to whom such a call comes may gather under the roof of this monastery and endeavour to be Gargis and Maitreyis, Sanghamittas and Mira Bais, in a new India that is rising before us.

There are currents and cross-currents in the social life of modern India that tend to tear women away from their cultural and spiritual moorings and create a disequilibrium in their minds and in the life of the community. Women are a great steadying influence in society. But if unsteadiness and unbalance invade their souls, what shall happen to society? The invasion of the Western ways of life and thought is there: but that is nothing new. Among the new currents, prominent mention may be made of the women's growing demand for various rights and privileges in the domestic, social and national spheres. A sympathetic and realistic view would show that these demands have at their back a desire for a larger life and freedom, a desire to break away from the oppressive past. All such demands and desires, to be beneficial to the individual and to society, must be tempered by the steadying influence of religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality, when translated in terms of the social values of love and tradition—love of one's culture, of personal purity and love of the neighbour, assume a power for social transformation and stability. It is not possible for all in society to live an intensive spiritual life. But the testimony of history, and specially of Indian history has been that a few men or women living the life can supply the spiritual leaven to transform the whole society and be the spiritual ballast to it. The life of the few dedicated women in the proposed monastery and in other institutions run by them will, it is hoped, not only stand sentinel over the high ideals of Indian womanhood but will also function as a stabilizing factor in the social and spiritual life of India. Thus this Organization's work for women's welfare deservedly assumes a national importance, inasmuch as they embody the springs of silent power for national reconstruction and stability on lines envisaged by Swami Vivekananda.

AS IF SHE IS NONE IN THE AFFAIR!

Before starting for her South Indian pilgrimage, the Mother was one day at noon sitting absent-mindedly at Kothar and thinking alone about the miseries of the world and the Master's repeated incarnations for its redemption. When an attendant came there she said to him: 'So the Master comes again and again—the same moon every night. There's no escape, he is caught in it. As they say: Coming many a time and oft you get sorrows upon sorrows. And how long still would you endure this pain? Is that only the lot of men? It is of the Master as well. So I have been thinking on. I see no end to this. What suffering for the Master! Who will understand?' The attendant submitted: 'Why of the Master alone, Mother? It is yours too. The Master and you are really one.' 'Fie!' admonished the Mother, 'Should one utter such a blasphemy, my foolish boy! I am only his maid-servant. Did you not read, "You are the mechanic and I am the machine; You are the housewife and I am the house; I work as You make me do?" The Master is all; nothing but he exists.'

From: *Sri Ma Sarada Devi*

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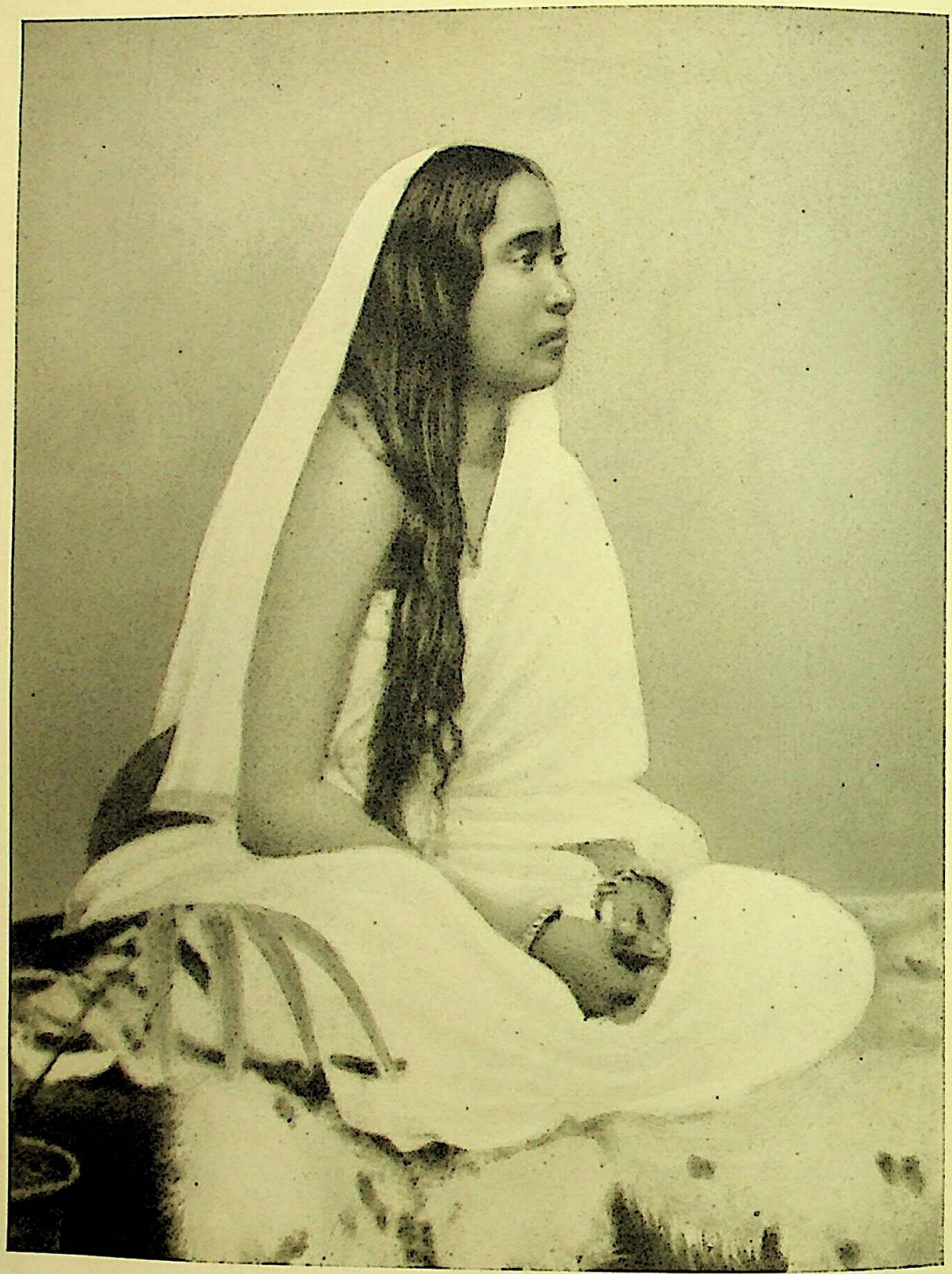

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WOMEN AND HINDU MONASTICISM

Brahmacharini Asha

Since time immemorial India has been the land of spirituality; self-realization or the attainment of perfection has been the sole aim of human life. The ancient history of India is full of incidents showing how worldly prosperity and enjoyments never satisfied the introspective Hindus who turned their vision inwards and spent their lives in search of truth. They pondered over the fleeting and transient objects and felt their utter unreality. The miseries of the world arising out of the sufferings of repeated births and deaths made them eager to transcend the life of unreality. The truth was revealed to them that the only way to liberation lies in the real knowledge of Brahman.

'A man who knows It (Brahman) alone truly passes beyond death. There is no other path to go by.'[1]

Only by attaining Immortality one can go beyond death and enjoy Eternal Bliss. How can this be attained? 'Give up,' say the Vedas. That is the one way. Only by renouncing the world can one attain Immortality.

'Neither by work (sacrifice), nor through wealth, nor through progeny but by renunciation alone Immortality is reached.'[2]

It is renunciation which purifies the heart, prepares the mind to receive the spiritual knowledge and enables it ultimately to realize the highest, which is eternal bliss.

'Everything in this world is fraught with fear, it is renunciation alone that makes one fearless.'[3]

In the religious life of the Hindus, among the fourfold aims of human existence namely, *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, the last has been given the supreme place. Therefore among the four stages of life the fourth stage or the stage of *Sannyasa* is for the *mumukshu* that is, one who desires to be free by following the path of renunciation as laid down by the *Sastras*. The doctrine of renunciation thus has all along been the key-note of the Hindu religious life and thought.

From the Vedic age up to this day many Hindu men and women have attained the highest goal of life through renunciation. The religious life of a Hindu woman was never different from that of a man. On the ultimate issue sex was not taken to be an important factor at all.

In the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* we find a reference to the *Viraja* mantra. For those who desire to be liberated the Viraja mantra has been enjoined. It aims at removing all *rajas* or impurities. The mumukshu has to give up every sense-enjoyment, cut off all connections with relatives and home, forgo all attachment towards his own person and become indifferent to everything worldly. He has to offer everything in the *Viraja-homa* and become absolutely pure.

The great commentator Sayanacharya, in his commentary on the above text has said that any one desirous of following the life of Sannyasa is allowed to recite these mantras. There he has made no distinction of sex. In the Vedas too nowhere it has been said that women have

1. *Sveta. Up.* III. 8. तमेव विदित्वाति मृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय।
2. *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 8-14. न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः।
3. Bhartrihari's Vairagyasatakam, सर्वं वस्तु भयान्वितं भुवि नृणां वैराग्यमेवाभयम्।

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no right to lead a spiritual life nor has she been debarred from entering the life of renunciation.

In the Vedas many *Rishis* or spiritual discoverers are found who are also called the *mantra-drashtrs*. There were also many women who were Rishis. The *Rig-Veda*, the most ancient scripture, gives a list of twenty-seven women who were seers or *Brahmavadinis*. Saunakacharya in his *Brihad-devata* has enumerated the names of these Brahmavadinis.[4] Viswavara was not a seer but she acted as a priest in a sacrifice. Vak, the daughter of the Rishi Ambhrin, composed eight mantras of the 125th *Sukta* of the Xth Mandala. These mantras are known as the *Devi–Sukta*. Vak realised her identity with the Universe and said, 'I am the Rashtri, I am the Goddess of the Universe.'

In the Upanishads we come across the names of illustrious Gargi and Maitreyi who by their characters have illuminated the whole Vedic period and still stand as beacon-lights to the daughters of India. When the sage Yajnavalkya was about to renounce the world he wanted to offer a part of his riches to Maitreyi, one of his wives. But she rejected knowing that it cannot lead her to Immortality. Being entreated by her Yajnavalkya imparted to her the knowledge of Brahman as a means to attain Immortality. Gargi was the daughter of the sage Vachaknu. She was well versed in Sastras and answered the challenge of the sage Yajnavalkya in the learned assembly of Brahmanas at the court of king Janaka.

We find in the Scriptures that women had equal rights in every sphere of life. In the *Atharva-Veda* it is said:

> 'A maiden wins a young husband through Brahmacharya or Vedic studentship.'[5]

As no one was admitted into studentship without going through the ceremony of *Upanayana* it goes to prove that women in ancient India were entitled to go through the Upanayana ceremony. From this we may infer that women had the right to enter all the four stages of life.

The following passage occurs in the *Harita Dharma Sutra*:

> 'There are two types of women, the Brahmavadinis and *Sadyovadhus*. Out of these, Bramavadinis have to go through Upanayana, keeping fire, Vedic study and begging in one's own house. The latter were only initiated somehow into Upanayana before their wedding ceremony.'[6]

Bhikshacharya means living on alms. In this context it means the renunciation of the world. This word is mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which is one of the earliest Upanishads, in which the ideal of sannyasa, the renunciation of the worldly life, finds expression. Neither sex nor age can be an obstacle.

> 'Whenever one feels intensely the urge to leave the world one is justified to enter the monastic life.'[7] 'To us for whom the Atman is the only desired thing what

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4. II. 82-87.
गोधा घोषा विश्ववारापालोपनिषत्। ब्रह्मजाया जुहूर्नामागस्त्यस्य स्वसादितिः॥
इन्द्राणी चेन्द्रमाता च सरमा रोमशोर्वशी। लोपामुद्रा च नद्यश्च यमी नारी च शाश्वती॥
श्रीर्लाक्षा सर्पराज्ञी वाक् श्रद्धा मेधा च दक्षिणा। रात्रिः सूर्या च सावित्री ब्रह्मवादिन्य ईरिताः॥

5. II. V. 18. ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम्।

6. As quoted in *Smriti-Chandrika*, I. p. 24. 'यत्तु हारीतेनोक्तं द्विविधाः स्त्रियो ब्रह्मवादिन्यः सद्योवध्वश्च। तत्र ब्रह्मवादिनीनामुपनयनमग्नीन्धनं वेदाध्ययनं स्वगृहे च भिक्षाचर्येति। सद्योवधूनां तु उपस्थिते विवाहे कथंचिदुपनयनमात्रं कृत्वा विवाहः कार्यः॥

7. Jabalopanishad, 4. यदहरेव विरजेत् तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत्।

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do children and other things matter.'[8] 'Those who did not want children attained Immortality.'[9]

Such texts should be taken as applicable to women also as there are no texts excluding them from a life of Pravrajya. From this and in the absence of any prohibitory text we can safely conclude that during the whole Vedic period women had full liberty to pursue their spiritual goal.

The idea of monasticism for women is present through different ages. In the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* references to sannyasinis prove that women held no inferior place in spiritual matters. In the *Ramayana* we come across one class of women who cast off all worldly ambitions and led a life of spiritual discipline. They are referred to as *Tapasis*, *Bhikshunis* and *Sramanis*. Anasuya, Swayamprabha and Sabari belong to this class. Anasuya led the life of a *vanaprasthi*. She explained to Sita the duties of a wife when the latter came to the forest. Swayamprabha, the tapasi, practised asceticism in a cave of a forest. Sabari was a sramani. She led a strict ascetic life. After meeting Ramachandra she was assured about the attainment of her supreme goal and offered her body into fire.

When Sita wanted to accompany Rama to the forest during his exile the latter tried to dissuade her by dwelling on the dangers of a forest life. But Sita insisted on going by saying that since her childhood she had heard from her father about the Bhikshunis and their ways of life in the forest.

In the Santi Parva of the *Mahabharata* there is the story of sannyasini Sulabha.

'The nun by name Sulabha while walking alone all over the land heard the other sannyasinis extolling Janaka as a competent speaker and teacher of Moksha.'[10]

In his *Chaturdhari* commentary on *Moksha-Dharma* the commentator Nilakantha says:

'By the use of the words Bhikshuni it has been shown that women had the right to renounce the world before marriage or after widowhood. Accordingly it was their duty to beg alms, hear the moksha-sastra, in solitude meditate on the Self and to hold the *tri-danda*.'[11]

Mitakshara in the Prayaschitta Adhyaya of the *Yajnavalkya Smriti* quotes a *sutra* of Bodhayana to the effect that according to some acharyas even women could accept the ascetic mode of life.[12] It proves that Bodhayana was also a supporter of the monastic life for women. Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* speaks of a woman ascetic *(parivrajika)* named Sankarā.[13]

Manu does not recognize the rights of women in this sphere. Upanayana for women became an obsolete practice and she was not allowed to cultivate Vedic studies. It might be due to the seasonal waning of the influence of the Vedic cul-

8. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 4. 22. किं प्रजया करिष्यामो येषां नोऽयमात्मेति ।

9. *Chhandogya Up. Bhashya*. V. 101. 1 ये प्रजां नेषिरे ते अमृतत्वं हि मेजिरे ।

10. महीमनुचरैका सुलभा नाम भिक्षुकी ॥ तया जगदिदं कृत्स्नमटन्त्या मिथिलेश्वरः । तत्र तत्र श्रुतो मोक्षे कथ्यमानस्त्रिदण्डिभिः ॥

11. 320. 7. भिक्षुकीत्यनेन स्त्रीणामपि प्राग्विवाहाद्वा वैधव्यादूर्ध्वं सन्यासेऽधिकारोऽस्तीति दर्शितम् । तेन भिक्षाचर्यं मोक्षशास्त्रश्रवणमेकान्ते आत्मध्यानं च ताभिरपि कर्तव्यम् । त्रिदण्डादिकं च धार्यम् ।

12. On III. 58, स्त्रीणां चैके इति बोधायनेन स्त्रीणामपि प्रव्रज्यास्मरणात् ।

13. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, 2, p. 945.

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ture as a consequence of which the status of women in different walks of life degenerated. In the *Manu-smriti* the then current social customs are mirrored. With the deterioration of the status of women in different spheres they also lost their position in the spiritual world. That is why during the later smriti period women were deprived of many of their rights and privileges in social as well as religious life.

During the Buddhist period, however, women were permitted to participate in the life of renunciation and were freely admitted into the monasteries. The Buddhist nuns have left a series of glorious pictures behind them. The names of Gautami, Shukla, Kshema and Supriya will for ever shine bright through the pages of spiritual history.

The Jain religion also recognized equal rights for women in embracing monastic life and there are names of many nuns associated with the Jaina Dharma. Among the twenty-four *Tirthankaras* Mallinatha, the 19th, was a woman, and as such was considered as an *avatara* who had taken the human birth for the salvation of mankind. The Jain Parivrajikas are still to be found in Gujerat, Kathiawad and Cutch.

It is true that later Hinduism denied women their privilege to lead monastic life. As it has already been said social degeneration of the Hindu civilization seems to be the cause of it rather than the want of competency in women. The historical fact of foreign invasions also played no small part in restricting the freedom of women. This is proved by the fact that from time to time through different periods many women are found to have had a real hankering for leading a monastic life, so much so that the prevailing social bar could not prevent them from renouncing the world and embracing the wandering life of a sannyasini. All over India, specially in the South and Maharashtra many women rose to admirable spiritual eminence.

The Tantric age once more afforded women full freedom in the practice of spiritual *sadhanas*. The Tantric sannyasinis were called *Bhairavis*. Till this day women are given initiation into sannyasa—*purnabhisheka* as they call it—according to the Tantric rites. One of the Gurus of Sri Ramakrishna, Bhairavi Brahmani, was a sannyasini of this Order.

All this answers the oft-discussed question whether or not the Hindu woman had the right to lead a monastic life. The above mentioned facts go to prove that from the Vedic times downwards monastic life was for all those who aspired after it. Through the passage of time, however, due to social reasons women were generally deprived of this right. In the present century, with the efforts to regenerate our old ideals this ideal of monastic life is receiving fresh impetus and the admittance of women into sannyasa by some of the *dasa-nami sampradayas* shows that it is not against Sastras.

A new chapter in the history of spirituality has begun with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. His call to religious life has been echoed thus:

> 'God alone is real, every other thing is unreal.' 'The aim of life is to attain Godhood.'

As Sri Ramakrishna came not to destroy but to fulfil he gave full honour and support to the rights of the Sastras. Though his life was extraordinary and above anything formal, to preserve the *Sanatana* ideal he took initiation into the formal monastic life from Totapuri. Women's right to lead a spiritual life has been recognised by his acceptance of the

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Bhairavi Brahmani Yogeshwari as his Guru or spiritual teacher. As Totapuri initiated him into the Vedantic sadhanas, Yogeshwari led Sri Ramakrishna through the spiritual practices of the Tantras. With the advent of an incarnation new currents of spiritual thoughts influence the lives of men and women. Thus by having a woman as his Guru Sri Ramakrishna reinstated the spiritual status of women which had almost been forgotten in the century preceeding his birth. That is why this incident is significant and has had far-reaching effects so far as the spiritual progress of women is concerned.

Swami Vivekananda, who has been rightly called the commentator on the life of Sri Ramakrishna also recognises and supports the right of women to sannyasa. Swamiji was even more eager to give priority to women in this matter. For he believed :

> 'There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.
>
> 'Hence, in the Ramakrishna Incarnation, the acceptance of a woman as the Guru, hence his practising in the woman's garb and frame of mind, hence too his preaching the motherhood of women, as representations of the Divine Mother.
>
> 'Hence it is that my first endeavour is to start a Math for women. This Math shall be the origin of Gargis and Maitreyis, and women of even higher attainments than these.'

Daughters of India are expected to share great responsibilities in building up of a new India. Sister Nivedita, the true lover of India, has said :

> 'It is essential, for the joyous revealing of that great Mother, that she be first surrounded by the mighty circle of these, Her daughters, the Indian women of the days to come. It is they who must consecrate themselves before Her, touching Her feet with their proud heads, and vowing, to their own, their husbands', and their children's lives. Then and then only will She stand crowned before the world.'[14]

No one can minimise the contribution of women in the struggle for independence which proved what sacrifice and what amount of suffering they could endure for the freedom of their motherland. Women of India today are becoming gradually conscious of their inner power and are coming forward to take their place in as many spheres of life as possible. The darkness of ignorance which kept them behind the curtain for centuries depriving them of education and other privileges is gradually disappearing. The modern age has ushered in a new era for women when highly qualified ladies are distinguishing themselves by holding various responsible offices. Many have devoted themselves to the service of humanity. Women of India have met with considerable success on the intellectual, social and economic planes; yet without spiritual progress the final fulfilment cannot be attained. For in India a true woman has first to play the role of a spiritual person, following the footprints of the Holy Mother.

Sri Sarada Devi or the Holy Mother as she is known among the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna holds a unique position in the spiritual world. We find in her a harmonious combination of a householder, a mother and a nun. She gave initiation to hundreds of men and women and also monks and thus quenched the thirst of many spiritual aspirants. She bestowed her unbounded love on one and all, irrespective of class, creed or sect. Her exem-

14. *Hints on National Education in India*, (1923) p. 53.

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WOMEN SAINTS OF CHRISTENDOM

P. Chenchiah

Saintology—to coin a common name for the attitude of religious men to saints—is an institution of the Roman Catholic Church. It has its origin in the desire of the pious to honour and perpetuate the memory of those who have sacrificed their lives for Christ. From the early centuries a list of those who fell victims to persecution was carefully prepared and preserved by the Church. The doctrine and practices of the Catholic Church with regard to Martyrs go by the name of Martyrology. It was later, however, expanded into Hagiology—worship of saints who, though they have not suffered martyrdom, have sacrificed their lives for the cause of Christ and lived an exemplary life. These were called confessors and came to be included in the list of martyrs. The Catholic Church prepares a Calender of Saints—assigning dates for their commemoration. Thus every day of the year celebrates one, and sometimes more than ten saints whose festival falls on that date. An ordinary Roman Catholic calender mentions not only Church festivals but also the saints whose festivals fall on each day of the year. Horology is the name given for such a calender. It is also called Menology.

Cannonization grew out of popular recognition of certain eminent martyrs and saints. The Bishop during the early middle ages had the power to decide what saint should be honoured in his diocese and on what day. A vague reputation for having worked miracles and for sanctity was sufficient to secure a place among saints. Men with evil repute go into the company of saints under this loose procedure. This led to the establishment of a method and process by which a saint can be placed on the calender. By the decrees of Popes Alexander III (1170), Innocent III (1200), Urban VIII (1634) a procedure, which still obtains for cannonizing was evolved. The jurisdiction in this matter rests in the congregation of sacred rites and starts with the appointment of a Vice-Postulator to make inquiries and report to Rome. On the receipt of the report, if further action is necessary, a court on behalf of the congregation of rites is appointed. An advocate (Advocatus Dei) is nominated by Postulator-General to speak in favour of cannonization, and since the days of Benedict the XIV an advocatus diaboli too—to argue contra. The decision of the court comes before a session of the Cardinals presided over by the Pope. The votes of the Cardinals are taken and the Pope finally decrees that the saint's name be placed on the calender and assigns him a feast

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plary life is the eternal source of inspiration to women in every sphere of life. Apparently a simple village lady, she rose to attain the position of a spiritual head of a great monastic Order. She has thus opened out a way for modern women to follow. It is high time that women in hundreds, selfless pure women, full of love for their own motherland and the world at large come forward to renounce everything 'for the good of the world and their own liberation.'

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day and declares that the saint is universally worthy of worship. At each stage the candidate gains higher status—Venerable, Beatus and Sainthood. Cannonization is completed by a solemn mass of the new saint in the Church of St. Peter, Rome, preceeded by a reading of the bull of cannon. The attitude to be observed to a saint is ordinary dulia (devotion). Higher dulia is reserved only for Mary—Mother of Jesus and Laitra—adoration—for God only. The Catholic Church forbids public veneration of any person not Papally cannonized.

Who are cannonized? No living person is cannonized. At one time a century should elapse between the life of the saint and cannonization. This has been reduced to fifty years. Chiristian saintology has grown in a spiritual atmosphere of universal prevalence in all religions and therefore contains features common to all religions as well as distinctive characteristics due to historical circumstances. Essentially medieval in mood and temperament and representing a phase in the evolution of religions, the modern life has not been propitious for its growth. Nevertheless a historic religion cannot be understood without reference to its saintology. Christianity was born and grew to its manhood in the midst of persecutions. Jewish persecutions tried to eradicate Christianity at its birth. Not only its founder but early followers suffered at the hands of Jewish priests. In Roman empire these persecutions, initiated and maintained by emperors of absolute powers and unlimited resources of law and emotion, attained to colossal dimensions. Christianity became a crime under the penal code of Roman emperors. Starting with Nero, the persecution reached its heights during the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian and continued up to the reign of Marcus Arelius—Emperor-philosopher of Rome. It was taken up by Huns and all non-Christian races and came to an end in Europe only when Europe became nominally Christian in 10th and 11th centuries. The cruel tale continues in every country in the East-China, Japan and Arabia. Perhaps the only country where the persecutions are restricted to social ostracism, occasionally though very rarely lapsing into killing is India—whose hands may be said with an exception or two, to be clean of the blood of Martyrs. The persecutions reveal the depths of human infamy, heights of religious fanaticism and cruelty. Men, women, children, learned and ignorant were all immolated with horrible tortures of rack and fire. Men were boiled, flayed alive and burnt. Persecution of Christians is a dark blot on human nature showing its hardness, pitilessness, monstrocity, devilishness as never it did in history. At one time eleven thousand virgins were butchered. If on one hand persecutions show to what depths human depravity can descend the persecuted show to what heights of divinity human nature can rise. These—even children—endured persecutions courageously—(not faltering for a moment in their loyalty to Christ, not stooping to devices and dubiety to escape suffering)—and with the praise of God in their hearts and forgiveness of their tormentors on their lips. If cruelty rose like a raging sea, love was equal to the occasion. Among the Martyrs were nobility, and commonality, lords and labourers, old women and babes, lettered and unlettered; all manifesting an amazingly spiritual outlook and conduct. Verily the blood of Martyrs was the seed of the Church. This martyrdom, this ordeal of death is the distinguishing birth mark of Christian saintology. Saintology was throughout its life essentially Martyrology, nur-

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tured in suffering. In India saints withdrew from life, struggled with the mind and illusion and reached the perfection they sought for. Hence *ananda* was the hall-mark of perfection while persecutions made suffering and sorrow the indelible birth marks of a Christian saint. Christian saint is one who suffers lovingly and rejoices in suffering. Martyrology thus forms a distinctive and distinguishing feature of Hagiology.

The ascetic strain is the next striking feature. In this it discloses a family resemblance to Saintology of Hinduism. The world and the flesh are regarded as evil— as enemies to be fought and surmounted. In India *Brahmacharya* plays a prominent part in the making of the saint. Its counterpart in Roman Catholicism is the exaltation of virginity as a saintly quality. Most women saints of Christendom have V. M., i.e., Virgin and Martyr attached to their names as marks of saintliness. As *Nityabrahmacharis* are praised in Hinduism, *Nityabrahmacharinis* are extolled in saintology. There were family women among saints but their number was few. Where a woman saint of Catholicism is not a Martyr, she is a virgin, who enters a convent and takes the veil. Curiously enough the relationship of God to Man as husband and wife is imported into this realm and the virgin is the bride of Christ, though He Himself was a Nityabrahmachari. The dominant attitude is one of hostility to secular life and a desire to achieve saintliness by withdrawing from it. Incidentally, beauty which draws the affection of man was regarded as a temptation. Some women saints of the Catholic church made themselves ugly and prayed for ugliness, recalling a similar incident in the life of Avvaiyar.

The third dominant characteristic of Christian saintology is its deep association with the cult of relics, probably a contribution of the non-Christian world. The saint, great in life and death is supposed to be greater after death. His burial place is a place where miracles are worked. Some dead saints are literally torn to pieces so that each church may have a relic. Not only the body and the tomb, but also clothing, articles used by them are invested with miraculous powers. In the popular mind the miracle-power is an invariable index of saintliness. In Hinduism and Islam the worship of relics persists as in Christianity. Before cannonization miracles after death are demanded as proofs of saintliness.

If we place moral excellence last it is not because it is not demanded in Christian saints but very often the other features cloud it from vision. Most of the women saints are of elevated Christian character. They have taken upon themselves menial services and have spent their lives in charity and service of fellow beings. The true insignia of saintliness ought to be and has been moral excellence.

We have to refer to a final feature in Catholic worship of saints. Some saints were psychologically over-sensitive, some were given to hysteria. It is often difficult to define the border-land. Visions and trances manifesting a peculiar psychological make-up are conspicuous in the life of many women saints. The dreams and visions filled them with ecstatic joy. They needed it more than their Hindu counterparts by reason of the suffering which was their portion.

These characteristics natural and spontaneous in the saints became tests of saintliness, which the Church had to impose preliminary to cannonization. Whether a person for whom the claim of sainthood was put forward deserves can-

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nonization or not depended on whether he satisfied these tests or not. The miracle-working power gained ascendency over other tests of saintliness—somewhat unfortunately.

There are many excellent lives of the saints. Alban Buttler—a Roman Catholic wrote more than ten volumes on the lives of saints. Rev. Baring Gould—a Reverend of the Church of England and a literati of reputation brought out a critical edition of 'Saints' in seventeen volumes. 'Acta Sanctorum' begun by Bollandus and continued by others, is not yet finished. These volumes (thirty-two in number up to August) aim at giving well sifted data for the 'Lives of Saints' and is regarded as a quarry book. Catholic Encyclopaedia may be consulted with advantage. An American publication, 'Miniature stories of Saints' by Rev. Daniel A. Lord S. J. with beautiful portraits—is available. Volumes II and IV describe the lives of about thirty-eight women saints. Up to 1914—when Rev. Baring Gould published his 'Lives of Saints' there were 2542 saints of whom 460 were women.

Since 1914 about 25 to 50 might have been added to the Calender of whom less than ten would be women. The total may be taken to be 2567 to 2592 of whom about 470 are women.

The love of man for God and the love of God for man know no restrictions of caste, class, rank, position, status and worthiness. Among women saints a large proportion are from the highest and higher ranks of the society but those of humble position are also well represented. Saints came from classes ranging from Empresses (Kunigund, Plucharia, and Helina), queens (Elizabeth of Hungary), noble women (Theresa, Catherine and Idda of Toggenburg) to shepherdesses (Genoveva, Mary the wonderful) and slave girls (Batheld, Bridget of Ireland, Julia); from Popes (Gregory and Leo) to peasants (Oringa and Zita); from theologians (Thomas Acquinas) to half-wits (Isodore) and harlots (Eudocia, Mary of Egypt and Thais).

Our aim will be to illustrate the peculiar features of women saints of Christendom—we have stated above. We give preference to moral excellence unaccompanied by psychical abnormalities and miraculous deeds though these will not be neglected. The Catholic prayer-book mentions nine women saints for daily recital. These are: (1) Mary, mother of Jesus (2) Mary Magdelene (3) Philomena (4) Agatha (5) Agnes (6) Cecily (7) Catherine (8) Anastasia (9) Lucy. In the Catholic Church a belief in the effectiveness of the intercessory prayers of saints forms an important psychological element. The *Bhaktas* pray to saints to intercede for them.

(to be continued)

BORN TO REDEEM

Once the Holy Mother was suffering from malaria at Jayrambati, and at the order of Swami Saradananda her attendants were not allowing any one to approach her for initiation. A devotee from Barisal arrived, eager to see the Mother, but the disciples would not let him into her presence. This led to an altercation, hearing which the Mother came to the door and asked the disciple why he was not letting the gentleman in. On being told of Swami Saradananda's prohibition, she said sharply, 'Who is Sarat to prohibit? I am born for this purpose. Eat something today, I shall initiate you tomorrow.' For, the devotee had gone there with the determination that he will eat only after initiation.

From: *Sri Sarada Devi*: *The Holy Mother*

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SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM

M. Hafiz Syed

Mahmud Shabistari whose exposition of Islamic Philosophy is recorded in these lines, was a native of Shabistar, a village near Tabriz in the province of Azarbaijan. He was born about the middle of the seventh century of the Hejira (A.D.1250). He died at Tabriz where he had passed the greater part of his life, in 720 A.H. The only particulars of his life recorded in the Tazkiras (memoirs of poet) are that he was devotedly attached to one of his disciples named Shaikh Ibrahim and that in addition to the *Gulshan Raz* he wrote two other treatises entitled, *Haqqul-yaqin* and *Risala-i-Shahid*. He was deeply spiritual and his inner experiences he has delineated in an exquisite poem of great value, *Gulshan-i-Raz*. The main substance of his philosophy is briefly expounded in these lines :

Sense and reason cannot transcend phenomena or see the real Being which underlies all; so sense and reason must be ignored or superseded by the 'inner light', inspiration or divine illumination in the heart, which is the only means by which men may apprehend the Infinite. Thus enlightened men see that the whole external, phenomenal world, including man's 'self,' is an illusion, non-existent in reality; and, in so far as it is unreal, evil, because a departure from the one real Being. Man's duty is to shake off this illusion, this clog of Not-being, to die to self, and to unite with and live eternally in the one real Being—Truth. In the progress toward this union external observances and outward forms profit little because they keep alive the illusion of duality, of man's self-righteousness; of his personal agency and personal merit; whereas the true course is to ignore all reference to the personal self, to be receptive to Truth that God may work within and the Divine light and grace enter the chamber of the heart and operate in man without impediment, drawing him to Truth and uniting him with the One.

How men are to gain this essential knowledge of God ? The answer commonly given is, by thought. But thought is of two kinds, one logical, reasoning, the other spiritual, illumined. The first is inadequate because sense and reason cannot transcend phenomena and penetrate to the invisible and incomprehensible Being underlying them. They are powerless to shake off the illusion of the apparent reality of the sensible world. This original defect of the lower mental sight, when it alone is used by the philosophers and theologians, shows their incapacity to thus apprehend God.

This annihilation of the lower mental vision caused by its proximity to the Light of lights—this consciousness of its own inadequacy caused by its approach to Being—is the highest degree of perception which such conditioned being can attain. When the seer attains this state of the annihilation of his phenomenal self, the true light is revealed to him, as a spiritual illumination streaming into his soul.

The phenomenal world is in itself Not-being, wherein are reflected, as in a mirror, the various attributes of Being. By a species of radiation or effluxion of waves of light from Being, each atom of Not-being becomes a reflection of some one divine attribute. These effluent atoms of Being are ever striving to rejoin their source, but so long as their phenomenal

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extrusion lasts they are held back from reunion with their divine source.

With regard to man, he is the soul of the World—the microcosm. While other creatures reflect only single divine attributes, man reflects them all. He is an epitome of the universe, and so by introspection he may see in himself reflections of all the divine attributes, the fulness of the Godhead. But on the other side he is black with the darkness and evil of Not-being. His object therefore should be to purge away this non-existent, corrupt side of himself, which holds him back from union. And, union once attained, lower thought is no longer possible, for it involves duality.

The third answer to the same question is that to 'travel into self' means to journey out of the phenomenal, non-existent self into the real Self, which is one with Truth. This journey has two stages, dying to self and abiding in Truth. When man's phenomenal self is effaced and the real Self alone remains, law has no longer any dominion over him.

In the fourth answer these journeys are called the 'journey up to God' and the 'journey down from God in God', and are a sort of circuit, and he who completes the circuit is the Perfect Man.

When man is born into the world evil passions spring up in him, and if he gives way to them he is lost. But, if he attends to the promptings of the Divine grace and light in his soul, he repents and is converted and journeys up to God—effacing self-will, false knowledge and his entire phenomenal, corrupt personal self-existence. By purifying his nobler part from the stain of externality, he ascends in spirit to heaven, and is united in spirit with Truth. This stage is the holy state known as saintship, exemplified in saints and prophets.

But the Perfect Man must not pause in this ecstatic union, which is above all laws. Notwithstanding his exaltation he must journey down again to the phenomenal world, in and along with God, and in this downward journey he must conform to outward laws and conditions. His sanctification must bring forth the outward fruit of good works.

Mahmud Shabistari states that the man who knows this secret—that all things are One—dies to self, and lives, with regenerate heart, in God. He sweeps away all that comes between God and the soul and breaks through to the oneness, as Eckhart said. Good works, it is true, raise men to a 'laudable station,' but so long as division and duality and 'self' remain, complete and permanent, true, mystical union of God and man is not attained.

But if man and God be one, how comes it that man feels within him emotions of love and aspiration drawing him towards God? In man's present phenomenal state, the mixture of Not-being in him divides him from Being; and these aspirations are the stirrings of the true Being within him, recalling and drawing him as with a magnet to his source. If he be not of those who are born blind to this spiritual light within, these sparks kindle up the flame of love to God, which burns up his phenomenal self, and shows him his real Self one with Truth.

The man who, like Mansur Hallaj, the wool-carder, has carded away his phenomenal self, can say: 'I am the Truth'; for when man assumes his eternal nature, the other, i.e., Not-being, is annihilated, and nothing is left but Being. When God withdraws what belongs to Him, all things fall back into their original nothingness. All phenomenal existence is merely an illusion, as may be illustrated by echoes,

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reflections, past and future time, and fleeting accidents, whereof, it is said, the externality or objectivity of substance consists.

It is then answered that the creature state being thus non-existent, man cannot of himself move, draw near to, or unite with Truth. Union is only a word for annihilating the phenomenal element in man—sweeping off the dust of contingent being. The genesis of the creature world is an eternal process. It is as a drop of water raised from the sea of Being in mist, poured down in rain, converted into plants, animals, man and finally recalled into the bosom of the sea. Phenomena are constantly annihilated in the universal Noumenon, and this annihilation is union.

Mahmud further says that the illusion of free will is Magianism, setting up an evil first cause, Ahriman, against the good, Ormuzd. This illusion must be shaken off and annihilated by the conviction that the only free agent is Truth and man a passive instrument in God's hands, and absolutely dependent in His pleasure. Man's glory lies in abandoning his self-will, and finding his true will in God's will.

Going back to the relation of the law to the state of sanctification, in the fourth answer called Truth, and here called 'the knowledge of faith,' Mahmud compares the former to the shell and the latter to the pearl within it. The Sufi must extract this pearl; but he must not break the shell till the pearl within it is fully formed. The law is the schoolmaster to bring him to Truth. Without this faith, this fixed spiritual attitude, this settled internal character, or state of the heart, no external works, however lawful, are virtuous in the highest sense. Lawful and formal works cannot sanctify man; it is the saintly disposition which sanctifies works. From this disposition all the virtues lie in the mean, in equipoise and harmony, and this harmony of the soul calls down and attracts the Spirit from above. This heavenly Spirit operates in man like the sun's beams on the earth. Enamoured, as it were, of the harmonious soul, the Spirit enters into a mystical marriage or union with it, the issue of which are gracefulness, virtue and the beauty of holiness. But all these are not of man who worketh, but of God that giveth grace.

In the 11th answer Mahmud says: Absolute Being is the summum genus embracing all being. But in one sense actual phenomenal being is wider, because it is absolute plus phenomenal limited being. This phenomenal side is renewed every moment, as indicated by the texts about 'the new creation'. Similarly the texts about 'the resurrection and world to come' indicate that the dispositions acquired by men in this life will then be manifested in 'spiritual bodies', i. e., forms appropriate to them. The Perfect will then drink the 'pure wine' of union with God. There will remain no duality or distinction of persons. Hence faith, reason, devotion, paradise and houris will become an empty tale. Such will be the perfect Union in the world to come; but in this world all ecstatic union is followed by sobriety and separation.

Mahmud concludes this part of the discussion by reiterating his main thesis that all things are One. The Eternal and the temporal are not two distinct entities, since the temporal is merely a subjective illusion, like the circle of fire seen when a single spark of fire is rapidly whirled round.

The last three sections are devoted to an explanation of the figurative language in which the Sufis express their conceptions of God and the universe, and their ecstatic

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A SURVEY OF THE PRESENT STATE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE WORLD

G. Cruz–Santos

In one of his speeches the Aga Khan made a very effective comparison:

> 'A country is like a human body; men and women are the two lungs; if you reduce the power of women....it is exactly like a human being who has one lung perforated by tuberculosis, and only one lung to work.'

What he said of a country is equally true of mankind, and, unfortunately, for many centuries mankind tried its best to breathe with only one lung. The re-education of this great body to the use of both its 'lungs' is not being accomplished without many difficulties, but one of the most significant features of our century is how these are slowly but steadily being overcome.

It would of course be impossible to study thoroughly the vast problem of women's education in the limited scope of an article. What can be attempted is to give a general idea of the present position and current trends.

In most countries of the world, the equal right of men and women to education is fully established by law; the difficulties arise in the application of the law! It is here that we find discrimination due to economic and social factors, and to deeply ingrained traditions, such as the desire to restrict women to their important role as wives and mothers. It should be made clear once and for all that there is no contradiction between this role (with the duties it implies) and the right to education, and this right should be stubbornly vindicated. Indeed, the more educated a woman is the more effective the part she can play in the family and the society to which she belongs. The standards of a community depend to a very great extent on its women; certain elementary rules (for instance, hygiene) will be accepted by a people as a whole only if women understand the benefits obtained for the family when these rules are observed. It is for this reason that fundamental education campaigns are often specially focussed on women. This too is the reason why governments try to fight illiteracy among women as well as among men.

During the past fifty years illiteracy has been in regression throughout the world and it is encouraging to note that in most European countries it has been eradicated.

(continued from the previous page)

experiences. Although this language seems irreverent and unseemly to us now, it did not seem so to them then. Symbols that we see as inadequate and misleading were, not improbably the highest conceivable by the minds of other ages and countries, and thus possessed, perhaps, a relative goodness of their own. The last answer shows us that one of the main characteristics of the Sufis was their readiness to recognize and appreciate whatever seemed to them to be good and true in other religions: Christianity, Magianism, and even Idolatry; and there is high authority (if authority be needed) for thinking it not inconsistent with our loyalty to our own religion to mete out similar tolerance to them.

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Some of them do not even take illiteracy into account when organizing a census, as is the case with Germany, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom. Outside Europe the situation is the same in several countries including Australia, Japan and New Zealand. Nonetheless it remains unfortunately true that about one half of the world's population still cannot read or write. As far as women are concerned the position is especially serious in Africa and Asia, where the percentage of illiterate women in almost every country is more than 50 per cent of the total female poputation, and sometimes as high as 99 per cent. For South America and Oceania, the percentages range from 15 per cent to 70 per cent. In general, it can be said that, in 1953, countries where the rate of female illiteracy was more than 50 per cent accounted for about 30 per cent of the world's population; those where the rate was between 10 per cent and 50 per cent made about 15 per cent, and those where the rate was less than 10 per cent represented some 10 per cent. About 35 per cent of the world's population is unaccounted for owing to the difficulty of gathering data for certain countries, but it is thought that these latter would have a female illiteracy rate of over 50 per cent.

In attempting to solve the problem of female illiteracy various social, religious or economic factors have to be dealt with. Religious traditions are sometimes hostile to women's education, or forbid co-education in regions where this would be the only possible solution; sometimes, in countries where different religions exist, parents do not want to send their girls to schools belonging to other religious groups. When custom obliges women to marry young, this of course creates an obstacle to their education. Economic factors are equally important. In under-developed countries, the main source of income is agriculture, and women are needed to work in the fields as well as in the home. In such conditions, sending a girl to school means an actual loss to the family income. Furthermore, it is often believed in rather backward societies that an educated woman will be more exacting and will probably refuse to do heavy work. These backward communities often have no opportunities for educated women, whose earnings do not compensate for the money spent on their education. It is accordingly difficult to make the parents understand why they should send their daughters to school.

There are other factors too; insufficient schools for girls, curricula often unadapted to the needs of women's and girls' education, shortage of adequately prepared women teachers, etc.

However, governments are striving to improve the situation and in many cases are achieving good results. Fundamental education campaigns are bearing fruit; and, as compulsory education is implemented, young people of both sexes reach a higher cultural level. In many countries (Portugal and some Latin American countries for instance), characterized not long ago by a vast disparity between men's and women's education, boys and girls are now practically on the same level; but the prevalence of illiteracy among the older women will for some time yet keep the total percentage of female illiteracy in these areas fairly high.

If we consider now formal school education, it will be easily appreciated that the situation varies at the different levels, and it is easy to foresee that in the climb towards higher education, the enrolment of girls begins to lag behind that of boys with the difference becoming more accentuated nearer the top.

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When interpreting statistics of women's education at a certain level, it can be said that equality is attained if the percentage of girls enrolled is between 47 per cent and 52 per cent of the total enrolment, as this variation reflects the variation in the birth rates. It should also be borne in mind that there are two kinds of data to be studied: percentage of girls enrolled compared with the percentage of boys, and the percentage of girls enrolled compared with the total number of school-age girls in the country. It is thus possible to know, not only if there is equal educational opportunity for boys and girls, but also what proportion of the female population still remains illiterate or has no access to a certain form of education.

Equality is often found at the primary level, because that is where education can be enforced and is, in fact, often compulsory. And where governments have implemented compulsory education, they have almost always treated both sexes alike: girls and boys have the same right to education and the same obligation to attend school. There are, naturally, exceptions: in one case (in Bremen, Federal Republic of Germany) education is already compulsory for girls but not yet for boys; in other cases (Pakistan and certain Indian states) the position is reversed. Sometimes the period of education is shorter for girls than for boys (the State of Madhya Bharat in India, the canton of Valais in Switzerland, Ceylon), sometimes it is longer (three Indian states: Delhi, East Punjab and Pepsu).

Primary curricula and syllabuses are in principle the same for boys and girls, at least in basic subjects, although the contents can be taught in such a way that there are certain adaptations in order to meet the different interests of each sex. This is for instance the method used in Germany, Spain and Ecuador. It is a widespread practice to have differential programmes of practical activities; home economics being generally included in the curricula for girls. It is interesting to note that some countries leave the choice open, so that a girl can follow courses of woodwork for instance and boys learn needlework if they want to (Iceland, England and Wales). Physical education in primary schools is generally given separately, even in mixed schools, although there are some notable exceptions (U.S.A., England and Wales.)

Of course the question of the possibility of implementing compulsory primary education for boys and girls is very closely linked to the possibility of training the necessary teachers. The matter is important from many points of view, as although teaching is one of the careers where the highest percentage of women is found (especially at pre-school and primary level), one of the main obstacles to girls' education in some countries is that there are very few qualified women teachers to take care of them. Teaching as a career appeals strongly to women, but in almost all countries there is shortage of women teachers. The reasons for this vary. In some regions women's education is relatively recent and therefore only a small number of women have the cultural background which would enable them to teach. In other countries, the problem is that teachers' salaries are comparatively low and women choose other occupations.

But the consequences of this shortage are not always unfavourable: the demand for women teachers is bringing a progressive disappearance of some of the discrimination against them. For instance in some countries like the U.K., Australia, Canada when women teachers married they had to resign from the permanent

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posts they held; now, they can continue their teaching and those who had previously resigned are being re-employed. There are even cases where women teachers are paid more than men (India: Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal, Vindhya Pradesh); though, on the other hand, in a great many countries, women still receive a lower salary for equal qualifications. Such is the case in Australia, Canada (Quebec, Terre-Neuve), Ireland, Luxemburg, Norway and a few Swiss cantons. On the whole, governments are making an effort to train as many women teachers as possible, and to give them the best possible conditions of employment.

Only very few States have extended compulsion to cover secondary schooling. At this stage, there are two different aspects; general or academic education, and vocational or professional training.

It has already been pointed out that the percentage of girls enrolled at secondary level and in institutions of higher education falls almost everywhere below the percentage of boys, in spite of the legally established equality of access in the majority of countries. Tradition is strong; only in the course of the last fifty years have women really begun to claim their right to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. and succeeded in combating the centuries-old prejudices which prevented them from practising in such fields. There are still, even in culturally advanced countries, faculties or higher schools statutorily reserved for men. And there are still professions legally open to both sexes, but which seem to attract the attention of only one; this is more or less the case for engineering, veterinary science, agriculture, theology and economics. No doubt one of the reasons why girls do not choose these professions is that it would be difficult for them to obtain employment in what is considered by custom and tradition to be a 'man's occupation'.

In the strictly vocational field, there are two tendencies. One of them is towards the opening of every craft and trade to women, giving them the possibility of choice in accordance with their own tastes and abilities, although there is still no country in which girls may take up all the vocational courses open to boys. However during the second world war women were considered suitable for tasks they would never before have dreamed of being entrusted with. Once the war was over, they went on carrying out their responsibilities and what they acquired then seems now to be theirs for good! The other tendency is to increase vocational training for women in what has been always considered as their own province: home economics, nursing, dressmaking, etc. It corresponds to a desire to equip girls for earning their own living in a relatively short time; it is also thought that here they make the best use of their natural qualities of patience, delicacy of touch, etc. At any rate, the general trend is to offer girls vocational training leading to socially better posts in all sectors of the national economy in almost every country.

What conclusions can be drawn from such a brief survey?

The first and most important would be that, in spite of efforts to improve the present position in women's education, there are still many factors which impede the general progress towards equality with men, especially in higher education. These factors are social and economic, and are generally linked in such a way as to be practically inseparable. It is obvious that the opportunities children have of continuing their studies depend in a large measure on the ability of their parents to support them. This factor becomes more

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and more important as the child reaches the higher levels of education; quite apart from the need to pay fees, and loss of earning capacity, higher education often involves the very considerable expense of the student's residence away from home. When parents cannot keep all their children at school, they usually give priority to the sons rather than to the daughters.

Then again in almost every country girls marry younger than boys. Parents often feel it is not worthwhile to pay for the long and expensive education of a girl who will soon leave them for another home and will probably abandon her career to take care of her children.

The degree to which public opinion more or less favours the access of women to occupations formerly reserved to men, plays an important part in determining the opportunities for education offered to women. Many avenues are in practice closed for women through tradition, prejudice and the like. Many people still think that a woman's place is in the home; and there is often a feeling against men being placed in subordination to women in employment, particularly in industrial and technological work. In other countries, there is unwillingness to engage married women because of the interruption of work through maternity.

But we must remember that the profound economic and social changes of recent times have brought women into situations which require preparation and training if they are to be dealt with adequately. In such situations, the overcoming of prejudice is a sheer necessity, and often a matter of life or death for a country. For instance, when there is a dearth of industrial labour, women are called upon to work in factories regardless of any opposing tradition. Or in time of war, many wives lose their husbands and have to face the necessity of keeping themselves and their children, and many women have to step into a man's post, either in order to keep it for the absent husband or father or just because the country has to carry on.

Finally, it has to be borne in mind that women are playing every day a more active part in the life of nations. There are very few countries where women are still denied the exercise of their rights as citizens; almost everywhere they vote and are eligible for public posts. They are still held responsible for the direct welfare of their family and they share the men's responsibility in the direction of the state. They have to supply new proof of their ability and capacities in spheres which, up to now, were very remote from their daily interests. The only way to prepare them for their new duties as citizens and as women is to give them education: educated women will help educated men to build a happy and peaceful world.

MODESTY, ORNAMENT OF WOMEN

One afternoon several women devotees came to see the Holy Mother. One of them was particularly bedecked with ornaments and nice clothes. She was a little restless. Addressing them the Holy Mother said, 'You see the only ornament of a woman is her modesty. The flower feels itself most blessed, when it is offered at the feet of the divine image. Otherwise it is better for it to wither away on the tree. It pains me very much to see a dandy making a bouquet of such flowers and putting it to his nose saying, 'Ah, what a nice smell!' Perhaps the next moment he drops it on the floor. He may even trample it under his shoes. He does not even look at it.' (It was reported later that a long time before, the husband of the particular woman had left her and gone away for some unknown destination.)

From: *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*

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THE EDUCATION OUR DAUGHTERS REQUIRE

R. S. Subbalakshmi

Man is composed of body, mind and Spirit, and a harmonious development of these three is absolutely essential to make him Perfect.

Women as men also need to develop these three aspects in them and an ideal education for them is one that helps in the evolution of all the three entities in them, the physical, mental, and spiritual.

In the early Vedic and Upanishadic periods, women seem to have had greater opportunities and facilities for the growth of their intellects and Spirits.

पुरा कल्पेषु नारीणां मौञ्जीवन्धनमिष्यते ।
अध्यापनं च वेदानां सावित्रीवचनं तथा ॥

Just as boys, girls also had the *Upanayana Samskara* and had a course of Vedic education. They were also entitled to the four *Ashramas*: *Brahmacharya*, *Garhasthya*, *Vanaprastha*, and *Sannyasa*. Marriage was not obligatory on women, and she could, if she wanted, lead the life of a Brahmacharini, and spend her time in trying to attain *Brahma-jnana*. Men of those days, i.e. more than three or four thousand years ago, seem to have had greater consideration for women, greater respect for them, and treated them more on an equal footing with them.

And, what a change, not for the better as it should be according to the law of evolution and progress, but for the worse, has come over the Hindu society since then! Men, taking advantage of their physical strength and superiority over women, have all along striven to keep women under subjection and denied them equal rights in educational and cultural growth. *Dharma-shastras*, laws and codes and rules are all framed by men and they are all partial to men. Their inhuman nature, and selfishness have gone to such an extent as to make women believe in '*Sati*' or self-immolation in the funeral pyre with their dead husbands.

Till a few years ago, they have been kept in utter ignorance, illiterate, meant only for pleasing their husbands and bringing forth children. Their physical body alone (of course, those of married women during only the lifetime of their husbands) was decked with ornaments and raiments, even that only if they were blessed with loving husbands; so much so that women were perfectly happy and contented with just physical comforts and never thought of their inner and higher faculties; so much so that if a woman became a widow, it was considered that she was absolutely of no further use to the family or society, and as a matter of fact, she was considered to be a burden unto herself and others. What a gulf of difference between the women of those Vedic days and these, about whom there was a doubt as to whether they were human beings at all and whether they had a soul like men!

Of course, in the midst of this dismal picture, there have been women now and then, throughout the history of India, who were blessed with congenial opportunities to exhibit their talents, as great poets, painters, musicians, and even warriors. There have been heroic mothers, ideal wives and dutiful daughters. There have been great religious leaders also among women who have had a beneficial influence over ruling kings and statesmen too.

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In the last 200 years, under the foreign regime, there have been revolutionary changes in all spheres, mental, moral, and spiritual, due mostly to the type of education introduced. A secular English education has gradually and imperceptibly reduced the goal of education to a bread and butter aim only. A son is educated in order that he may get some job, earn a living and support his family. The cultural, moral, ethical, and spiritual values of education have been pushed aside and even forgotten. The natural corollary was that a daughter need not be educated since she was not going to become a 'High Court Judge' and *earn* money. In the new awakening, in the last one century and a half, one or two per-cent of girls were sent to schools and that only for a short period of three or four years after which every girl was married, as per custom, before she attained her age.

In the past fifteen to twenty years, there has been a great revolutionary change. Due to increased population, growing poverty, high cost of living, and heavy dowry system, girls—unmarried girls—are coming out in large numbers to be educated with a view—an only view—to earn and help themselves and their family, i. e. old parents, sisters and brothers. They have very little chance of getting married. Parents are not in a hurry to get them married for fear of losing these milch cows—these earning members.

Now, the big problem in free India is, what reforms and changes are required in the present type of education which was really framed and fashioned under the foreign British regime.

Our great leader, the Father of our Nation, realised that the education was all book-centred, all theoretical with no practical application to life, with no practical knowledge. He thought of a Craft-centred Education and opened an Experimental School at Wardha. This is the basis of the present new scheme of Elementary Education* that has been introduced in several schools at present. It is a very good scheme and we want a panel of able and intelligent men and women to prepare a detailed syllabus to be followed by not only the teachers in schools, but by the parents at home. After all, an educational scheme is full and complete only when teachers and parents co-operate and when schools and homes supplement each other. As per the view of the great educationists, a child begins to learn even from its very birth, and mothers are the first teachers responsible for training their senses, building their body and intellect and moulding their character and helping in the evolution of the divinity in them. So, it is the mother who has the greatest share in the education of her children. Teachers come only next to her. I know of intelligent and responsible mothers and other older male and female members in respectable, cultured families, keeping their young ones round them in the evenings, telling them stories of great men and women of *puranas* and histories, and I know how profoundly these early foundations have influenced these young ones in their later lives. So then, 'Home' is the first school of children and parents and elders at home, their first and best teachers. Under the able guidance of such loving and intelligent teachers, children learn a great deal through their senses and the restless children are 'learning a great deal by doing' using their hands as well as their sense-organs. Children of such families need

*Subsequent to writing this article the new Ministry in Madras has scrapped the scheme.

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not even go to school up to their seventh or eighth year, after which they can join the fourth or fifth class straightaway. Especially children who are delicate and nervous, with a fear complex for teachers and schools should be kept at home so that their physical growth may not suffer. Children must run about and play a great deal if they are to have a strong and healthy body. Learning through play activities, should be the method of teaching up to a certain age.

The four simple rules up to 1000, names of days, twenty-seven stars, sixty years, fifteen Tithis can all be easily memorized by children as also easy stanzas and poems. Up to the age of about nine or ten, i.e. up to the fourth standard, the elementary education stage, there need be no difference in the syllabus for boys and girls. Observation of natural phenomena, the seasonal activities and life-history of birds, animals, insects, plants, trees etc., should be learnt, not cooped up in a class-room, from teachers and books, but from the open book of nature. Teachers should be with them to guide them. In the class-room, the facts gained through observation may be summarized and written down. Children should be helped to be happy, care-free, buoyant, running about, playing games and thus develop a healthy and strong body. In places where there are rivers or tanks, children should get into the habit of bathing every day in the river or tank, to keep their bodies and hair clean, to wash their own clothes, dry them and keep them folded. They should learn to keep their places and belongings clean and in an orderly way. On the whole, good habits should be inculcated in them from their very early days.

Now, we come to the middle school period of education. It is from here that boys and girls should learn some useful work of economic value. The Bhoodan Yajna, initiated by Sri Vinoba Bhave has brought in wet and dry lands. My suggestion is that every middle school and high school should be allotted some of these wet and dry lands. Boys should have plenty of work in fields, and girls should do plenty of garden work in the dry land, and grow vegetables, greens, fruit trees, and flower lants. Preparing the ground, laying out pretty ornamental plots, sowing seeds, watching their growth, watering and manuring them etc., are a healthy vocational practical training of great intellectual and physical value.

To collect the vegetables and cook them properly is the next training to girls. This part can best be done by girls in their homes under the supervision and guidance of their mothers. From the simple to the more complex, there are varieties of rice preparations, sauces, pepper water, sweet and hot dishes, festival dishes, dishes for sick and convalescing people etc. A list of these and a syllabus of the number of dishes to be learnt in each class can be prepared. During the year, each girl should prepare these in her home under the guidance of her mother, write down in a note book, the dish prepared, the ingredients used with costs and quantity etc. and get the signature of her mother with her remarks and then take it to school for the teacher's signature. This is an ideal way of learning home science. Then comes the programme of eating: what to eat, how to eat, how much and at what intervals to eat, how much water to drink etc. are all very important matters that need our attention. They should also learn to use less coffee and tea, and have other beverages of greater food value and thirst-

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quenching value, viz., thin butter milk, dilute jaggery beverage with flavours etc.

For girls, one other useful occupation of economic value is needle-work and embroidery. It is essential that girls should prepare their own clothes. It will certainly be ideal if they get the training from the start to the finish—to grow cotton, to spin and weave cloth and stitch the cloth into garments. This is a long and strenuous process, and all may not find the time to take up all the work from start to finish. Every young housewife should however know to stitch the garments required for herself and the children, to mend them and use them all in as economic a way as possible. To some needy people, it is a source of income also. Garden work and cooking, bath and swimming in rivers, tanks etc. give enough exercise for body and mind and help them to develop in a healthy and sound manner.

Now, we come to the third entity in girls, the Spirit. Spiritual growth and development is as essential as or even more so than physical and intellectual growth. Our Indian Government think that education in schools should be secular. Moreover, religion cannot be taught, it should be lived. Practice and not precept should be the motto of religious people.

Elders at home should set an example to the young ones by being themselves pure, honest, truthful, fearless, tolerant, kind, compassionate and full of faith in and devotion to God. Festivals should be observed and there should be puja, bhajan etc., mornings and evenings or at least on special days and occasions.

In schools also, as an extra-curricular activity, talks by outsiders on moral and religious topics can be arranged. In schools where there are children of different religions, lectures by Hindus to Hindu children, by Christians to Christian children etc. can be arranged.

These moral and religious training are very essential to girls and young women since they have the sole responsibility of bringing up their children.

Post-school training and education are very necessary for young married women. Having families to look after, they cannot attend regular schools and classes for a number of hours. Social service organizations, Red-Cross Associations, Doctors' Unions etc. can arrange for series of lectures for one hour a day for married women on First Aid and home-nursing, health and care of children, cooking and other home sciences, crafts, music, and other arts, like drawing, painting etc. and religious discourses, and moral talks etc.

Lastly, women's education based on her everyday life and experiences with husbands, relatives, children, neighbours and society at large, is the best, and to amplify and regulate this, she should read good books and journals at home or in libraries and reading-rooms, organized by the Government, Corporations, or Social Service institutions. It is a useful recreational, intellectual, and informational hobby for every woman to build up a small library of her own at home and collect good books. She will be then able to train her children also to get into the habit of reading good books for a short time every day and widen and expand their knowledge in various spheres.

May God shower His blessings on Mother India and help her daughters to develop their physical, intellectual and spiritual *Saktis* and so become Saktis themselves to preserve the Independance of Mother India. May they have the Sakti to go above all distinctions of caste, creed

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WOMEN AND THE RENAISSANCE OF INDIAN ART

Rukmini Devi

A true renaissance in art is only possible when the spirit of art is understood. The real message of art is from the spiritual world. Though art is an outer expression in terms of beauty, it is the innermost soul that makes great art. Without the soul, art is but an empty shell. Art has ever been an instrument of spiritual expression in India. Wherever there has been a decay of spiritual ideals, art has gradually deteriorated. Therefore it is important to remember that it is not possible to have an artistic renaissance without a renaissance in character. The two must go together. Whether art is the forerunner that moulds character or whether character creates the art is difficult to say. But we can see both in history and there is no doubt that true art is like fire that purifies and elevates humanity. In the history of every nation one can see that wherever a civilization has attained a high level of greatness, there art and beauty have played a great part. In Greece beauty was worshipped. In Egypt art made the civilization shine. The most outstanding quality of the Chinese civilization was the exquisite sense of beauty. In India, there was not only the sense of beauty but an understanding of its place in civilization. India being a land of the sages and the seers, it was possible for India to give the inner meaning and the philosophy of art. They knew its potent influence for good, its power to stir the emotions of humanity and its power to refine. It is because of this that great sages have written books on Natya Sastra, music and other arts. Most of the great saints have sung their teachings and philosophy. Valmiki Ramayana was sung to Sri Rama and saints like Mirabai and Kabir poured out their devotion in music. We sing today the songs of those saints.

In what way is art so closely linked to women? To my mind there is no difference in spirit between woman and art. When we think of an ideal woman she is the essence of spiritual and physical beauty and grace. The reason why everything beautiful attracts even an ordinary woman is because beauty is part of the soul of woman. To her it is like breath itself and without it she is untrue to herself. We think of Lakshmi as the Goddess of wealth and prosperity as well as beauty. People think of wealth as apart from beauty. The wealth of Lakshmi is her beauty and that is why even in adorning a home the more beautiful it is the more we call it a home full of the spirit of Lakshmi.

As art is a spiritual expression, when it becomes purely physical it degrades character and just as true art is a powerful influence for good, when misused it becomes an equally powerful influence for evil. The reason for this is that the nature of art is attractive. In each human being there is a response to beauty. When ugliness masquerades as beauty humanity is unconsciously drawn towards evil. This

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(continued from the previous page)

and class and be united. May they have that spiritual Sakti which alone will give them the moral courage and mental energy. May they strive always to aim at the Ideal, become Ideal themselves, thus setting an example for others to follow.

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is why it is a great responsibility to be an artist and an even greater responsibility to be a woman artist. When art is presented by woman, it is presented in its own element and becomes *sakti* in its sublime sense. She can lift up humanity and transmute its lower self. Therefore it is a glorious opportunity for women who wish to be priestesses at the altar of beauty.

Though India showed the way of beauty to the world through dance, music and other arts, she has also forgotten the way. The dance became degraded by vulgarity and nearly died. The idea of Deva-dasis is a beautiful one, for surely nowhere is art more wonderful than in the temple. But alas! the servants of the Gods were treated with dishonour by society and our country slowly forgot the message of Bharata and Nataraja. Today we are beginning to remember the art but unless we lift it from the level of modern vulgarities, which in my opinion are worse than the vulgarities of a hundred years ago, the art will not live long. The dance is no more allowed to be performed by professionals in temples, but the professionals had devotion both to the art and to the temple. Though there appears to be a tremendous advance in the appreciation of art and its expressions, though there appears to be a greater number of artists in every form of art, there is a general decline in quality. There are very few who are for art alone, who are dedicated and self-sacrificing. The cinema has attracted an enormous number of women and girls, but can one ever say that it has so far elevated the woman or that it has lifted India to a higher way of life? Western civilization has entered deeply into Indian life and has sapped the civilization of its true life, for India has become ensnared by the glamour of the West and has been insensitive to the more beautiful things of the West.

The result is chaos in almost all fields of art. Let us take for example art in daily life. There is no art centre more beautiful than the home and no art more beautiful than in the home with the exception of the temple. India attracted the West by her rich beauty and colours. Ugly colours were unknown even thirty years ago. It was equally a joy to see the peasant woman in the street as to see a queen in a palace. Whether the rich or the poor there was the equal sense of beauty and Indian women were ever sensitive to the beautiful. But now colour sense has almost vanished from among the rich and the educated though one still finds amongst the poor and working class people a good sense of colour and line. In the modern home too ugliness is spreading owing to foreign furniture, dress and other things. How shall the tide of ugliness be stemmed? The answer is undoubtedly, by the woman. In the hands of the Indian woman is the power to mould India into an image of her own realities. But that power will not come by itself for it must surely be only through a change of heart and mental outlook.

The most hopeful sign of what is to come is the revival of interest in art. Revival of interest will gradually lead to a revival of good taste and this may even prove to be a forerunner of a spiritual renewal. We are now at a stage in India's history which could either lead to a complete destruction of spiritual values or to a glorious resurrection of them. The only factor that can decide India's fate is intuition. Pure intellectual development will not be sufficient for it will lead to an even greater materialism than now. Intuition is the essence of keen mental percep-

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tion through an elevated and purified emotion. Emotion must reach a higher level, for without it, emotion can be as destructive as the intellect. The purification of the mind and heart will lead to intuition. This purification can be achieved only through true art, not that which is often called art. Even to discriminate between beauty and ugliness, one needs this great power of intuition. So much goes in the name of art today and the tragedy of it is that neither the artist nor the public is aware of the subtle harm that can arise out of this lack of discrimination. For me, ugliness is immoral, especially when it is perpetuated by man. Just as the effects of beauty on civilization are far-reaching on the constructive side, so are the effects of ugliness far-reaching. When ugliness pervades the earth, all that is of the lower nature of humanity is released and humanity becomes insensitive to higher influences. Therefore it is urgent and imperative that everything possible is done to help human beings to attain the sensitiveness to higher influences. Many of us believe that India is à land of the Sages and the Saints, that India has been hallowed by the presence of Divine Beings like the Lord Buddha, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and many others. Therefore India has the great destiny and responsibility of passing on their message to the younger generation and to the world at large. How shall India fulfil this mission but by being open to these influences? The only way to prepare for that is to train the emotions, purify them, so that the essence of emotion, the message of the heart, will be heard. This is the mission of art and in this great work women with their power of feeling, their power of devotion and with their innate quality of intuition can and should show the way.

Today Indian women are to be found in every field of artistic activity. Almost all children love beauty, while girl children are almost invariably desirous of becoming artists. What a marvellous opportunity for right education! But before educating we have to be educated. This is impossible unless first there is developed the sense of beauty in the grown up. In this field women must lead and must not be led. An uncompromising attitude is essential, and if each woman will make sure that her child in the early years of education will hear and see and speak nothing but the beautiful there will be a chance for the higher to penetrate our lower selves. Continuous noise from the loud speaker, continuous imitation of ugly films (most of them being ugly) and continuous use of ugly colours in our clothes, our homes and in our lives should be abolished. We are fighting today against orthodoxies, but do we realise that we are creating a modern orthodoxy in the name of freedom, in the name of openmindedness and in the name of progress. Real progress is in our openmindedness to all that is beautiful whether in the old or in the new and by that openness to be able to receive the Light that comes from above. Within the heart of the woman is still the spirit of devotion to the highest and within her is hidden the power to know realities. Woman has always been called more intuitive because of these qualities. She is now coming to the foreground in art, in politics and in all fields of activity. Only the quality of beauty will give her the power that makes her the real Sakti, for through beauty, religion will come to the fore in its truest sense. There is no art in India without religion. While religion has been made sectarian and through it we have created barriers, art remains an

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influence without barriers of race, religion or caste It remains the universal language of all people. At the same time this language is not the language of mere humanity but of the gods. As the true spirit of woman is expressed through devotion or *Bhakti*, this language can be known and brought down by her. This is why a woman is so eminently suited to undertake the uphill task of bringing about a renaissance in art. By this renaissance she can change the character of the country. She can lead the country from materialism into a future of magnificent possibilities. She can bridge the difference between the past and the present and fashion it into a new India of eternal values. She can bring into the world of mind and science, the real science of the Self and make a heartless world into a world of pity and benevolence. Most of all she can remove the cruelties that exist and make our land beautiful. Once a great Teacher said that if women were true to themselves then Christs and Buddhas will be born to them. If they are not born physically we can create the atmosphere by which their spirit, the spirit of all Teachers will be born. Such an atmosphere can be created by music, by dance, by drama, by the beauty in the home and by the lives that we lead. Woman, the great artist, must arise to bring her blessing to our country as Lakshmi rose from the ocean.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE THE WORLD OVER

G. Sundari P. Sarojini Devi N. R. Visalakshi

The women's suffrage movement began in the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain and the United States. The organized efforts of women to secure political equality with men in the various countries of the world have continued at an increasing speed ever since. After each of the two world wars, several countries granted women the right to vote and to hold public office in recognition of their war-time services. Between the wars progress was steady although less spectacular. In certain countries like France and Japan, social and economic progress of women had no bearing on their political rights. It was only very recently that France and Japan granted franchise to their women.

With the attainment of independence by several countries in Asia, women there have been granted suffrage without much agitation on their part. The number of countries which have granted women the right to vote on an equal basis with men is greater than that of countries where women have a restricted franchise or no political rights. Fifty states have granted women the right to vote on an equal basis with men; 13 states still withhold this right; 5 states have granted it to them with some restrictions; 3 allow them to vote only in local elections. Chronologically, 4 states granted women suffrage before World War I; 9 states by the end of World War I; 33 states between the end of World War I and the end of

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World War II; and 12 states after the end of World War II.

The Commonwealth

In England women were debarred from the Parliamentary franchise in 1832, when the word 'male' was put before 'person' in the Reform Act. J. S. Mill was a staunch supporter of the women's cause and he moved an amendment to the Representation of the People Bill (Clause 4) in 1867. He wanted to omit the word 'man' and substitute 'person' instead. The amendment was lost. In 1868 the judges in *Chorlton V. Lings* ruled that the word 'men' did not include 'women' with reference to privileges granted by the State. From 1869 to 1911 Bills and resolutions were constantly introduced in the House of Commons for granting women the right to vote. Altogether, besides resolutions, 13 Bills were introduced in the House of Commons and 7 of these passed their second reading.

The first women's Suffrage Societies were founded in Manchester in London and in Edinburgh in 1867 and in Brixton and Birmingham in 1868. These united to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. In 1909 there were only 70 affiliated societies but by 1911 they had increased in number to 305. Many other societies with women's suffrage as their sole object were formed such as the National Women's Social and Political Union, the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, the Women's Freedom League, the National Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society, the Fabian Society etc. William Thompson wrote in 1825 his 'Appeal of one half of the Human race, women, against the pretensions of the other half, men'. Robert Owen, Hodgskin, Hume, Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies and later on Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel were champions of the women's cause in England.

In 1907 women were qualified to vote in municipal elections and to serve as members of municipal bodies. In 1918 the Qualification of Women Act gave women over 30 the right to vote and to be elected to public office. In 1928 the Equal Franchise Act extended the right to vote in every type of election to women of 21 and over, granting British women political equality with men. In 1929 there was a woman Minister of Labour and recently a woman Minister of Education.

The Qualification of Women Act, 1918 applied to Ireland. Its provisions were retained when Ireland became a Free State in 1922 and a year later women were made eligible for election to national and local public office. The constitution of 1937 confirmed this right which was again confirmed under the Republic proclaimed in 1949.

Newfoundland granted women the right to vote in 1925 before she reverted to the status of a British dependency in 1933. She became a province of Canada by referendum in 1948.

In the Union of South Africa 'European' women of 21 and over have had the right to vote and to hold public office since 1930.

Ceylonese women were enfranchised in 1931 but their qualifying age was 30, whereas for men it was 21. Orders in Council removed this inequality during 1934-35. In 1946 two years before Ceylon became a Dominion of the British Commonwealth, universal suffrage and eligibility to hold public office were established on a basis of equality for men and women.

Pakistan is still governed by the Government of India Act, 1935 pending the passing and promulgation of a new Constitution.

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Australia was the first country in the Commonwealth to grant women equal franchise rights with men in 1918 and India was the last to do so when she granted unqualified universal suffrage in 1950. New Zealand gave the franchise to women on equal basis with men in 1927 and Canada in 1938.

India

In India, the system of election was first introduced in 1892. The franchise at that time was very narrow and hence the electorate was very small.

A Women's deputation generally known as the 'Vote for women's deputation' organized by Mrs. Margaret Cousins, who was a lieutenant of Mrs. Pankhurst in the women's suffrage movement in England and Ireland and led by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu waited on Mr. Montagu, when he visited Madras in 1917. It requested that the disqualification of sex should not be introduced in either Local Government or Legislative Franchise Rules.

The work of this Deputation was followed up by public meetings in support of women's suffrage, held mainly by branches of the Women's Indian Association, in local area by Political Conferences, by the Indian National Congress, by the Muslim League, by a women's deputation to the Southborough Commission on Franchise Reform (1918), and finally by deputation of women to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Government of India Bill in 1919.

The Reform Act of 1919 removed the sex disqualification. The Provincial Legislatures one after the other enfranchised women of their Provinces on the same terms as men. And so between the Madras Legislative Council in 1921 and Bihar Council in 1929 all the legislative areas of India had conferred equal citizenship with men on women who possessed equal qualification, viz. a certain level of literacy, ownership of property, age, payment of taxes, length of residence. Ownership of the requisite property or payment of taxes enfranchised men and women equally, but this right was in effect nominal for the number of women possessing rights in land and paying taxes in their own name was meagre. According to the 1935 Act wives or widows of men with property qualifications were eligible to vote, not to speak of those women who had property qualifications in their own right. Moreover, the standard in regard to property qualifications was substantially lowered. Payment of six annas of Chowkidari tax or union board rate or eight annas cess or municipal tax qualified one to vote, but before the 1935 Act was passed those paying less than Re. 1-to Rs. 1-8-0 had no voting right. Under the 1935 Act, an educational qualification was also introduced. Not only those women who owned property in their own right or whose husbands were property owners had the right to vote, but those who were educated up to a certain standard were also qualified to vote.

The present constitution of India offers to women, unqualified equality with men in matters of suffrage.

United States

The history of the women's suffrage movement in the United States starts at an earlier date than in Britain. From the time of the constitutional convention in 1787 the question of granting women the franchise was a major issue. Thomas Jefferson opposed granting women equal citizenship rights 'to prevent depravation of morals and ambiguity of issues'. Charles Brockden Brown, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, Frances Wright and Robert

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Dale Owen agitated for women's rights. A Women's Rights convention was held at Scenca Falls, New York in 1848. Emerson, Whittier, Channing, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendal Phillips supported the Women's cause later on until the campaign was laid aside during the Civil war. In 1869 an amendment to the Federal Constitution conferring suffrage on women was defeated in the house of Representatives, as were similar bills in succeeding decades. However, the pressure exerted on State legislatures was more successful. Wyoming granted women the right in 1868. Colorado Utah and Idaho granted women the franchise successively. In 1918 President Wilson who was an anti-suffragist recommended the passage of the National Suffrage amendment to the Federal Constitution as a measure 'vital to the winning of the war'. By 1920 it was ratified by the states as the 19th Amendment.

Western Europe

Though France was one of the last countries to give women equal franchise, Holdberg, Condorcet and Holbach who were the philosophers of the French Revolution in the 18th Century urged equal citizenship and educational rights for women. However, when a group of women proposed a Declaration of the Rights of women to the National Assembly in 1789, it was rejected with scant consideration, in line with Rousseau's judgment that 'not only women's education but their very existence is of value only in so far as it benefits *men*.'

The French Chamber of Deputies has since World War I repeatedly favoured the extension of votes to women, but the Senate has rejected it. In 1925 the election of 10 communist women candidates in the Paris Municipal elections was declared void by judicial decision. It was only in 1946 after World War II that France gave equal franchise rights to women.

In Germany the social Democrats had supported the movement for women's rights since 1891. The Women's movement grew steadily despite the fact that the Government had banned their political activities until 1908. When the Republic was established in 1918, women were given the right to vote by Governmental ordinance. When the Weimar Republic was established it also gave them the additional right to hold public office. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 they virtually abolished the women's right to hold public office although their right to vote was not curtailed. To-day in all zones of occupied Germany (and under the provisions of the Bonn Constitution for the Western zone) women vote on equal basis with men and have the right to hold public office.

Norway was the first Scandinavian, country to give equal rights to women in 1913. Denmark gave it next in 1915. A Danish woman was Minister of Education from 1924 to 1926. These rights were extended to Iceland which was under Danish rule. In 1944, when Iceland severed its ties with Denmark to become a Republic, she retained these rights under the new constitution. Sweden the last Scandinavian country to grant women franchise did so in 1921, previous attempts having been defeated in the Upper House till then. Now Swedish women take an active part in their national affairs. In 1948, 21 women were elected to the Lower House.

Italian women never exercised their rights to vote in Municipal elections which had been granted by the Chamber of Deputies. It was annulled under the Facist podesta system of appointing municipal

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authorities. After World War II Italy gave women equal rights in 1947. They voted for the first time in the plebiscite of June, 1946.

Luxemburg and the Netherlands gave women equal franchise rights in 1919. But Belgium was the last of the Low Countries to do so in 1948.

Portugal has given women franchise rights with special qualifications since 1945. Her neighbour Spain had given partial rights to women since 1926. When the Spanish Republic was founded in 1931, these rights were extended to give them equality but the present dictatorial regime of General Franco took them away.

Switzerland is unique in that her women have no political rights at all though she has developed a democratic constitution which is admired all over the world.

Eastern Europe

Austria, Czeckoslovakia and Poland were the first countries in this region to grant women equal franchise rights with men in 1919. The 1921 Constitution confirmed these rights in Poland. After the disorders of World War II Polish Women recovered these rights in 1947. The Franchise in Czeckoslovakia is exercised by all citizens on reaching the age of 18, while citizens are eligible for election to representative bodies on reaching the age of 21.

Rumania gave women franchise rights in 1935. The Republican Constitution of 1948 confirmed these rights. She has had a woman as Foreign Minister. In 1945 Hungary granted women of 20 years and over equal political rights with men. Albania and Yugoslavia granted these rights in 1946 and Bulgaria in 1947.

A bill granting the vote to Greek women in national elections and making them eligible to stand for office was unanimously adopted by the chamber of Deputies in Athens on May 29th, 1952. Greek women were allowed to stand for election to local councils for the first time in 1951.

After the Revolution of 1917 in Russia women were given the right to vote and be elected on a national scale by the provisional Government. In 1918 a Constitution was adopted by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets which gave women of 18 and over equal political rights with men. The new constitution of 1923 confirmed these rights. This constitution of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic became a model for all the Republics of the Soviet Union. Separate provisions relating to the franchise were left to the individual Republics. The Constitution of 1936 proclaimed for the whole of U. S. S. R. gave equal rights to women and men in economic, state, cultural, social and political spheres.

Asia

Asian women secured political rights comparatively recently. The Women's Suffrage movement in Asian countries has been less spectacular than elsewhere. In some of them like India it was obscured by larger movements like the nationalist movements which held the attention of the entire nation. In some countries women got their rights as a result of constitutional evolution without much agitation.

Turkey was the first big Asian country to give women equal political rights in 1934. Turkish women first voted in parliamentary elections in 1935. They had been given partial rights i.e. restricted to municipal elections, since 1930. Siam had granted these rights in 1932 when constitutional monarchy was established. In five Asian countries viz., Afghanistan, Iraq Saudi Arabia and Syria, women have no political rights.

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Elections for a new chamber of Deputies in Lebanon took place in July and August 1953. The elections were the first to be held under a new electoral law, promulgated by President Chamoun under his emergency powers in the autumn of 1952 under which women were granted the franchise and voting was made compulsory under pain of £. 50 for non-compliance without reasonable grounds. In the Philippines the question of granting women equal rights was decided at a plebiscite held in 1937 where only women voted. This was provided by the 1935 constitution and the Filippino women voted by an overwhelming majority to enfranchise themselves and today there are equal political rights for men and women in that country. Women of 21 and over may vote and hold public office.

Japanese women have been agitating for equal political rights for almost half a century. In 1898 a series of laws improved their legal status. The feminist movements conducted by the 'New Women's Society' and the 'Association of Proletarian Women' demanded equality for women in all spheres of life. Even when the suffrage was enlarged in 1926 Japanese women were denied the right to vote. But after the Second World War the new constitution gave them political equality in 1946.

In China, the revolutionary movement supported the demand by women for equal rights between 1922 and 1927. Both the provisional constitution of 1931 and the draft constitution of 1936 provided for the extension of equal political rights to women. But the Far Eastern conflict which began in 1931 prevented the practical application of these provisions. After World War II when the communists came to power and adopted the new constitution in 1946, women gained equal political rights with men. The constitution provides that a proportion of seats in the National Assembly must be filled by women. These are to remain vacant if women do not win them.

In Burma women voted on a limited scale from 1922. The Government of Burma Act, 1935 granted them equal eligibility. All women of 18 and over have enjoyed these rights since Burma became independent in 1947.

Mangolia gave women equal political rights in 1944 and Israel in 1948. The women of South Korea voted for the first time in 1948 when an election of representatives was held under the auspices of the U.N. All citizens of 21 and over were eligible to vote and those of 25 and over had the right to be elected to the National Assembly.

South America

Brazil was the first country in this region to give women equal political rights in 1932. A constituent state, the State of Rio Grande de Norte had given these rights earlier. The 1946 Federal Constitution confirms these rights of women.

In Cuba, a Presidential decree granted women equal political rights with men in 1934, and these were confirmed by the 1940 Constitution.

In Uruguay women have enjoyed full political rights since 1934. The 1942 revision of the Uruguay Constitution reaffirmed these rights.

The Dominican Republic's constitution of 1942 grants women equal political rights with men. All citizens who are 18 years of age and over or who are married are eligible to vote and to hold public office.

In 1929 Ecuador granted literate women the right to vote. A year later they were made eligible for public office if they pos-

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sessed certain qualifications. The 1946 Constitution granted equal rights to women, and men of 18 and over who were literate. Though Ecuador was a pioneer among the South American countries in granting voting rights to women, one distinction still remains between men and women voters—for men voting is compulsory ; for women it is optional.

Women were given equal political rights with men in Argentina only in 1947, though the women of the province of San Juan had enjoyed the right to vote in provincial elections since 1927.

In five South American countries women are given restricted voting rights. Bolivia granted women the right to vote in local elections in 1945. Peru granted similar rights in 1946. Two South American countries viz. Columbia and Costa Rica have withheld political rights from women.

Some Central American countries have given women these rights with special qualifications. They are Guatemala (1945), El Salvador (1946), and Nicaragua (1948). Panama has given women equal political rights since 1946 and Mexico partial rights, i.e. restricted to local elections since 1947.

Africa

In many countries of Africa no elections are held. In the British dependencies like the Gold Coast settlement elections are held but with restricted franchise and the qualifications to be met are high. Liberia is the only country which has granted equal political rights to women since 1945. In Egypt and Ethiopia no elections are held. It is however likely that a democratic form of Government where women would have equal status with men will be established soon in Egypt.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO HELP BUILD THE ONE WORLD

Mrs. Chit Thoung

Life as we live it in the world today, moves with such rapidity that never in the history of mankind has there been a parallel to it. No part of the world has been left untouched by the scientific achievements of the West and those of us in the East, who were never sharers in the scientific discoveries of the age, are left awed and spellbound by the various manifestations of what we feel to be the greatest achievements of our time. The luxuries and comforts that the age provides, would be unbelievable to those of us who lived even a century ago, yet the dissatisfaction and restlessness of man continue to grow instead of diminishing. In spite of all modern inventions for his convenience and material well-being, man fails to find the happiness he sought for in nature. The entire world is in a state of chaos, and the achievements of his brain which he thought would bring to him protection from hunger and want, as also the danger from

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those around him, only add to his increasing desires and fear mounts about him as it never did before.

To the casual observer, there could be nothing greater than these gigantic achievements. The power that these facilities bring with them constitute our civilization today. We are in the grip of civilization as we know it, its utilitarian and materialistic mode of life and thought dazzling us and holding us in thrall. We are steeped in its charms and have lost sight of the wisdom of the past. Yet if man would only pause to think, he could not fail to discern that, no matter how powerful an invention may be, it still is less powerful than man himself. The mightiest of inventions by itself has no life, for it yet needs the hand of man to give it life, force and direction. Hence no discovery or achievement however great, can equal the greatness of man himself.

In the palm of his hand lies man's destiny. Seeing things in this light, man still has time and always will have, to yet carve out his career on earth just as he chooses. He need not be overwhelmed with the manifestations of might he sees around him, for these after all, are but a product of his own brain. Within himself lie the potentialities of much greater discoveries, if he would but care to find out. For these greater discoveries he needs to turn his mind inwards, to seek for that which alone can bring to him the strength and power to withdraw it from the countless distractions of the world, thus calming its restlessness and filling it with peace and contentment which all the time he was but unconsciously seeking for in nature.

Just as the scientist in the laboratory needs quiet and concentration to enable him to wrest from nature her secrets, so also does the mind which is in search of this great strength and power, at whose will the most restless and turbulent mind must attain its poise and equilibrium. Only he whose heart is filled with peace and contentment can convey such to others. Generally speaking men of prayer and renunciation, whose lives are dedicated to the quest of the Divine are the torch-bearers of humanity. But they are few in number and rare indeed on this planet of ours. Yet one such is sufficient to light the way for thousands of us groping in the dark, restless in the mad scramble for ever-increasing enjoyments. As time and leisure to ponder and think over our daily problems are vitally necessary to give us a clearer perspective of life, so those of us who are less preoccupied with material achievements are in a more advantageous position.

In the average family life, the husband is so busy earning to provide for the ever-increasing demands of the family. Life proceeds at a tremendous rush and so much time is spent in earning and spending that he has hardly the time to pause or to think. There are so many steps to the ladder of success that his ambition keeps him continually occupied with its climbing.

In sharp contrast to his way of life, where he is daily dealing with objects whose material value alone is of concern to him, his wife is all absorbed in the little lives around her, whose daily unfoldment is a source of endless joy and interest to her. She is in daily contact with real life and its many subtle and varied problems, problems that have to be solved immediately they take shape, for the impatient young ones will brook no delay. Because these, her immediate charges, are so very dear to her, no sacrifice on her part, however great, is big enough for

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them. There is no limit to what she will endure to ensure the happiness and well-being of her progeny. Such is mother all the world over.

It is a recognised fact that woman can fully develop only in her own sphere. In some parts of Burma, a little girl starts life addressed as Mi (meaning mother) and when married a holy man addresses her as 'Hukarbyonhe' literally meaning 'one because of whom the food is cooked.' These two words amply describe the woman's sphere. It also signifies that woman as mother, and also as one on whose shoulders rest the well-being of the entire household and its guests, occupies a very significant place in the scheme of life. In this sphere, so peculiarly a woman's, she is at her best, and when naturally and fully developed is an asset to society and its civilization. She is also well aware of the fact that by fulfilling the ideals that these two words convey to her, her mental and spiritual growth is assured, and so she strives her utmost to live up to these ideals inculcated since childhood. She does not need to seek the solitude of the forest for her spiritual development, but by faithfully serving her husband and family in her own home, a woman can achieve in spiritual life, that which a monk can do in his life of austerities and contemplation.

To live so that one's life grows to be the fulfilment of an ideal, is a most difficult achievement for any human being. Her place by him is never to the front but always to the rear. For so long has it been so, that it has grown to be a natural thing with her to adapt herself to the most difficult conditions, conditions that ever demand patience and forbearance. She who weathers the storms of life with strength born of suffering and restraint, must well be endowed with the qualities so necessary to form the basis of a world order. Indeed she has a great destiny to fulfil and in the present chaotic condition of the world today, woman as mother, who has all these past centuries borne with the greatest hardships life has to offer, is well in a position to come to its rescue at this critical period of its history and help build the one world which is the crying need of the age.

AVVAIYAR

T. S. Avinasilingam

Avvaiyar is a legendary figure amongst the Tamil people. Her name is synonym of all that goes with wisdom, uprightness and human kindness. In all the wealth of ancient Tamil literature there is no personality which was so ingrained in the affection of the people as this woman saint of ancient India. It is difficult to say with certainty in which age she lived. From the prolific writings available to us upto this day in her name, it seems as if there have been two Avvaiyars, one a contemporary of the great Thiruvalluvar in about the second century B.C. and another belonging to a later period, about the 7th to the 9th century A.D.. The earlier Avvaiyar seems to have been the more outstanding person. It is natural

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that the life of this great saint coming from more than two thousand years back is shrouded amidst legends. But it is not difficult to see from those various stories the real Avvaiyar, a great woman, great in wisdom and human sympathy and friend of all people from mighty kings to the humblest men and women in all walks of life.

There is a story that she once went to see Siva and Parvati. She sat on the ground in the great Siva's presence with her leg extended towards the great God. Parvati was surprised and angry and said that Avvaiyar was insolent in her behaviour. She asked Avvaiyar why she sat with her feet towards the Lord. Avvaiyar replied 'Devi, you know I am an old woman, bent with age and can sit only stretching my feet in some direction. Can you show me the direction in which God does not exist, so that I can put my feet in that direction?' At this reply, Parvati was said to have been ashamed of her own ignorance and appreciated the wisdom of Avvaiyar. There is another story in which the old woman went to a King's coronation. The king sought her blessings and bowed down to her. Others who blessed the king said many things about the king becoming prosperous, getting more territory, more wealth etc.. When it came to the turn of the old lady, Avvaiyar merely said 'May the bunds of your fields be raised'. The king as well as those around thought she was insolent and could not understand things. The wiser amongst them knew, that there must be great significance behind it and asked her to explain. And then she explained:

வரப்புயர நீர் உயரும்
நீர் உயர நெல் உயரும்
நெல் உயர குடி உயரும்
குடி உயர கோன் உயர்வனே.

If the bunds are raised, it will mean that the water level in the field will be raised, this in turn will raise the yield of paddy, that in turn will raise the prosperity of the people; and that in turn will raise the status of the king, thus pointing out that the welfare of the people is the fundamental background of the king's prosperity.

It is said that she became an orphan while yet a child and was found and brought up by a man, himself a poet. At the age of sixteen when she became famous for her beauty, many kings vied with each other to get her hand in marriage; but she was deeply devoted to religion and literary pursuits and wanted to serve the people. With that end in view she did not want to become bound in marriage. Pressure of the foster parents was great. They could not resist the great offers emanating from such high personages and they at last decided to give her in marriage to a neighbouring prince. Avvaiyar, faced with this pressure wept and prayed before her chosen diety, Vighneswara, to save her from this predicament. She said,

> 'Oh! my lord, these people are only after my youth and my beauty; but I want to dedicate myself to the Goddess of learning and to the spread of learning. Please take off my youth and my beauty so that I can have peace and follow my chosen way of life'.

It is said that God heard her request and she immediately became an old woman with a common appearance. This relieved her from further proposals of marriage and she went round the then Tamil world preaching words of wisdom to every one she met. This may be a legend; but the truth is not far to seek. It is a truism to say that one can reach the highest knowledge only by undivided consecration to that cause. The joys of

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youth and beauty have to be discarded when one seeks the highest. This is what Avvaiyar seems to have done and in the course of a few years it became a legend in the form stated above.

She went round giving her words of wisdom to whomsoever she met from the humblest to the highest. During her trampings she met a couple. The wife was a termagant and the husband was being ill-treated by her in the lowest possible manner. The husband found Avvaiyar in a starving condition and taking pity on her invited her to his house; but he dared not suggest to his wife to feed Avvaiyar. In order to persuade his wife he caressed her, combed her hair, spoke sweet things to her and at last suggested that he had brought a poor starving old woman to the house for being fed. The wife flew at a rage and belaboured the husband. Avvaiyar observed it and walked away and when the man came apologizing she sympathized with him and said the following words:

> 'Married life is a joy and pleasure only when you get an affectionate and suitable wife; but when that is not possible it is hell, and the proper thing is to give up the household and take to Sannyasa.'

Similarly on another occasion during her perambulations she met a rustic doing agricultural work. His wife—this time they were an affectionate couple—was persuading him to leave the profession and become a servant under a neighbouring chieftain. They consulted Avvaiyar and she advised them as follows:

> 'The tree on the bank of a river and a life depending on a king—both these have an insecure existence and will crash sometime. There is no more dignified profession than tilling the lands. No other profession is as independent and dignified as agriculture.'

She was highly respected by the many kings who were ruling in the various parts of the Tamil land. Each vied with the other in inviting her to their courts. When there was danger of war on one or two occasions, she acted as a successful mediator between them. She pointed out to them that it is the ambition of the kings that created the wars; but the people who suffered were the common man and woman on both sides. She explained the evils of war and persuaded them into a peaceful life.

Though very much sought after by the kings for her wisdom she avoided them and liked to lead a simple life amongst the poor and the unsophisticated people who flocked to her wherever she went. She lived in their humble dwellings, ate their simple food, wore their plain clothes and guided them in their worries. She was so loved by everyone that she was called the Universal Grand-mother, and lived to a ripe long age and proved a blessing to all people in the many years that she lived.

She wrote many ethical works. The most famous of them are *Authi Chudi*, *Konrai Venthan*, *Ulaga Neethi*, *Muthurai*, *Nalvazhi*, *Nanneri*, *Nithi-Neri-Vilakkam*, *Neethi Venba* and *Aranericharam*. Some of these are in trite saying consisting of a few words and the others in quartlets in the usual Venba form. All of them are words of wisdom addressed to the young or to the grown ups. A few samples of these are given below:

1. Ponder ere you act. *Authi Chudi*
2. Boast not your parts. *Authi Chudi*
3. Though it is really rice that sprouts out of the husk, yet if the husk be gone, paddy will not grow; likewise even unto men of great energy, nothing will be possible except with suitable instruments. *Muthurai*

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4. Harsh words do not conquer soft ones; the arrow that strikes down elephants harms not a piece of cotton; the rock that is not split with the long iron crowbar, splits when the roots of a tender shrub enter it. *Nalvazhi*
5. However virtuous one may be, the low always speak of one's faults; even as in a fruitful garden, full of flowers and haunted by the bees, the crow seeks only the margosa fruit. *Nanneri*
6. Youth is a bubble on water; abundant riches are the long rolling waves of ocean, and the body lasts no longer than letters traced on water. Why then, my friends do you not worship in the Court of the Lord? *Nithi-Neri-Vilakkam*
7. True ministers fail not to approach the king and rouse him to the call of reason, assailing his ears with their good counsels undeterred by fear of his anger. The lusty elephant is guided by its driver and even so the ministers of a king are to him. *Nithi-Neri-Vilakkam*
8. The gem that adorns an assembly is a man of learning; that which adorns the sky is the sun;...that which adorns the house is the son. *Neethi Venba*
9. The very noble are as the lofty palmyra in giving, taking very little and giving much; next below are those who are as the cocoanut, giving as much as they take; last of all are those who are like the arecanut and the plantain, yielding much less than they take. *Neethi Venba*
10. Cool are the rays of the moon; cooler still is sandal paste; coolest are the pleasant words of the gracious who have love, learning and patience. *Neethi Venba*
11. O king of cool mountains! A man's accumulations stay behind in the house. His weeping kinsmen leave him at the crematorium. Fire consumes his body. Well considered, only his virtues keep him company. *Aranericharam*
12. It is not possible to calm down the waves before bathing. Even so it is no good waiting after one has grown rich, for riches may not then stand one in good stead. One should do good then and there according to his means. To him alone riches prove useful. *Aranericharam*
13. There is no virtue higher than philanthropy; no companion better than one's own wisdom; no conduct worthier than living with self-respect. These are the ways to be trodden by those who want to be free from blame.

SOME GREAT WOMEN OF MARATHA HISTORY

S. N. Sen

The first eminent lady who played an important part in Maratha history was Jija Bai, mother of Shivaji. Of her we know but little and that little is not based on solid evidence either. It is said that deserted by her fickle husband she devoted herself entirely to religion and her child. She inspired the little boy with that devotion to religion that made Shivaji in his later life the recognised champion of Hindu faith. It was from her that the child heard the stories of the epic heroes on whom his life was modelled. This may or may not be true. But from well authenticated facts one can with some amount of assurance infer how greatly the mother influenced the son's career. The first great crisis that

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Shivaji had to face was when Afzal Khan invaded his little principality. The future of the infant state depended on Shivaji's decision and no wonder he was sorely troubled. At this decisive moment he consulted his mother and with her blessings set out to meet the renowned Muslim-general with two attendants only. It demanded uncommon courage in the mother to send her son on such an errand. Again when Shivaji decided to make a journey to the imperial court after the strategy of Jai Singh had forced him to sue for peace he entrusted his war-worn kingdom to the care of his mother. It was a difficult task in all conscience. The state had recently suffered from the ravages of war; it had ceded a number of important strongholds to the victorious enemy; defeat had undoubtedly affected its morale, to what extent nobody knew at the time. There was no lack of enemies within and without its borders; some of the disgruntled nobles who had not hesitated to make common cause with the imperial power would not fail to exploit the absence of Shivaji to their own advantage. Was it wise to take the risk? A few years' respite, if it could be earned, would enable the Maratha leader to develop his slender resources, to repair the shaken morale of his people, to consolidate his power with a view to renewing the struggle for independence when the opportunity came again. In his opinion, the risk, great as it was, was well worth taking. His officers were men of tried loyalty and undoubted ability but some of them were to accompany him to Agra. Moreover they could not be expected to work in harmony once the wholesome control of the master was removed. Shivaji, therefore, left the kingdom to his mother's care. He would not have preferred the rule of a woman, though that woman happened to be his mother to that of his ministers unless he had been convinced that his mother was endowed with superior ability and wisdom. An ordinary woman would have quailed before the responsibility of acting as regent when dangers loomed large in all directions. Though details are lacking we know that Jija Bai maintained the integrity of the state during her son's absence and when he came back he found that his interests had not suffered in the least when he was abroad.

The chroniclers have left a charming picture of the mother and son sharing their sad affliction when Shahaji died of an accident. Like the ideal Hindu woman she was, Jija Bai at once decided to immolate herself but the disconsolate son would not hear of it. The hero of a thousand fields wept like a helpless child, clasped his mother's neck and finally persuaded her not to leave him, doubly orphanned, to fight his battles alone. The mother had boldly stood by the son at every crisis of his life and if the son has earned the eternal gratitude of the Hindus by defending their faith against the fresh onslaught of intolerance led by Aurangzib Alamgir let us not fail to pay our homage to the mother who inspired him in his early youth with the ideal for which he had lived and died, who sustained him at the moments of adversity, and imposed on him a healthy restraint at the moment of triumph.

Tara Bai, Shivaji's daughter-in-law, was the stormy petrel of Maratha history. Unlike her sister-in-law Yesu Bai she was unable to sacrifice her personal interest for the greater interest of the people. When Yesu Bai was taken prisoner with her infant son, Shahu, by the Mughals the future of her son did not worry her so much as the future of the tottering

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Maratha power. She unhesitatingly urged her people to recognise Raja Ram, her brother-in-law, as their rightful king and leader. But when Raja Ram was gone and providence sent Shahu back to his ancestral kingdom, Tara Bai stoutly opposed his claims and caused a rift in the Maratha ranks that was never to be healed. She bitterly fought for her imbecile son and when the tact and diplomacy of the Peshwa ultimately won the throne for Shahu and consigned her to a political prison Tara Bai nursed her grievance and patiently bided her time, unable to forgive or forget. The opportunity she had been longing for arrived at last when Shahu died without a legitimate heir. She readily patched up her differences with the Peshwa and placed her grandson on the throne. But the peace was short-lived. Tara Bai had expected to rule the empire in the name of the puppet she had produced but the puppet preferred to dance to the tune of Peshwa and the angry grand-mother promptly denounced him as an imposter. Then followed an armed contest in which the ambitious princess had the worst. Frustrated and foiled she lived to hate and rejoiced in the disaster of Panipat before death brought that rest which her vengeful spirit persistently denied her in life.

Many martial women figure in Maratha history; there was Saraswati Bai, the Prabhu Desain, who defied the might of Shivaji; there was in the last days of the empire, Tai Telin, the low-born mistress of an unworthy pratinidhi, who had forced a Brahmin general to beat a hasty retreat in the days of the mutiny; a daughter of the indigent Tambe family wedded to an imbecile prince of Jhansi proved once again that the war-like traditions of her race were not yet a thing of the past. But before we conclude a reference must be made to the poor shepherdess who came to share the Holkar fortunes. Ahalya Bai is still remembered with love and respect all over the country but hers was a tragic life. Widowed in early youth she might have found consolation in her son. But the son was a monster of cruelty and his insane pranks were a source of constant pain to the saintly mother. The untimely death of the unworthy son must have been a source of relief, for it is said that the unhappy mother had earnestly prayed for his decease. There was no heir and a state ruled by a widow is a source of temptation to all ambitious adventurers. Raghunath Rao, the uncle of the Peshwa, was never credited with moderation or good sense. He wanted to dispose of the Holkar state as he liked but he had not realised that the piety and benevolence that had prayed for a tyrant's death was buttressed with uncommon courage and resolution. Ahalya Bai boldly declared that she would resist arms with arms and defend her legitimate rights to the bitter end. Her last years were spent in those deeds of charity that earned her eternal fame. Tara Bai's days were consumed in unhappy ambition. Ahalya Bai converted sorrow into bliss and shed a lustre on the declining empire which it hardly knew in the days of prosperity.

Everybody says regretfully, 'There is so much misery in this world. We have prayed so much to God but still there is no end of misery.' But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion.

Be sincere in your practice, words and deeds. You will feel how blessed you are! His blessings are always showered on all creatures on the earth. It is needless to ask for it. Practise meditation sincerely and then you will understand His infinite grace. God wants sincerity, truthfulness and love. Outward verbal effusions do not touch Him.

HOLY MOTHER

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चरैवेति

QUEENLY QUEST

Kings and queens occupy an important place in ancient Indian stories. This can be accounted for in some simple ways. The writers were mostly saints, like Vyasa, having nothing to gain for themselves and, therefore, working free for the welfare of all. They were primarily *teachers*, not *administrators*. They knew that teaching, to be effective in society, needed the strength and wisdom of administrators. The latter too ought to be devoted to peace. But that was not enough. They had also to be adepts in matters relating to revenue, justice, war and diplomacy. Otherwise they would be unable to make the masses practise virtue and at the same time create prosperity and maintain peace.

The sages have made each story fairly true to life by the inclusion of scenes depicting love and the pursuit of pleasure. But they have taught unmistakably that such joys are transient. What is of greater value is the virtue that secures such joys and abides when they vanish. The sages have also taught that a few weaknesses in oneself can combine with the intrigues of others and let in a host of calamities. We all know the familiar patterns,—exile, menial service while living incognito, and a final struggle, sometimes involving bloodshed, but inevitable for eliminating weaknesses and strengthening virtue.

None can say that our teachers have been partial towards men. For they have shown that women can rise to heroic heights as much as men. Nay, in many cases they have pointed out that women have been saviours of men whose defects led to needless woe.

With these ideas forming a sound basis, we made a detailed study of how Damayanti manifested her queenly virtues even in her darkest moments. The main line of our discussion is indicated below in the form of questions and answers.

* * *

The medical student in our group had been going through the latest literature on 'shock'. She started the conversation.

Q: What was the first serious shock that Damayanti got?

A: Nala's mysterious appearance in her chamber as an agent of the celestials and his attempts to make her marry one of them, instead of himself.

Q: Why did he go on such a mission?

A: Our ancients held that great men ought to promise help to all seekers, irrespective of what they might demand. It was like signing blank cheques. Being a hero, Nala kept his word and pleaded whole-heartedly for the celestials. You and I would have collapsed under such an ordeal.

Q: How did she react?

A: With equal nobility. The sense of honour had made him subordinate his personal interests to the full implications of his promise. The same inner sense made her reject the celestials in order to remain true to Nala. This compromised Nala's position. So she said she would select him in the very presence of the celestials.

Q: How did they meet her strong resolve?

A: They all appeared exactly like Nala and made her choice difficult.

Q: How did she counter this unique love offensive of the visiting U.N. team?

A: You mean the 'United Nala' team? Very beautifully, through soul force, if you like to call it so. The celestials are at heart protectors of truth. So she appealed to them to respect her truth and show up the true Nala!

Q: How did they contrive to withdraw at this stage?

A: They acted like good diplomats. While retaining Nala's form, they made certain indications in the region of their eyes and feet, just enough to enable Damayanti to distinguish the purely human Nala.

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Q: Did they not smart within all the same?

A: What happened was just the opposite. As a wedding gift they granted Nala a few boons. He was henceforth able by mere will to create fire or water or pass through any obstacle unscathed.

Q: Draw some moral, please.

A: To hold on to truth may be immediately painful, but it is ultimately beneficial.

* * *

Our specialist in politics explained how so-called democratic parties were, in some places, turning general elections into a mean and costly gamble. She suggested that we might view Nala's gambling against such a background. We noted the point, but passed on without comment.

Q: What did Damayanti do when gambling proceeded?

A: First she sent her trustworthy nurse, Vrishasena, to the councillors to inform them of the seriousness of the king's plight. They came, but Nala refused to see them. Her next step was to despatch her two children to her father's palace.

Q: What was the climax?

A: Exile for both. Evil force, in the shape of birds, snatched away Nala's only piece of cloth. Damayanti promptly shared her only piece with him.

Q: Why did they not take refuge in her father's abode?

A: To minimise Nala's troubles, Damayanti suggested that course. But the king felt ashamed to go there in his misery. He wanted her to go alone. She, in her turn, refused this; so both suffered. At last in despair, Nala deserted her, while she lay asleep in the forest.

Q: How did she react to this shock?

A: It was now a series of shocks. In the course of her search for Nala, she was caught by a snake. A hunter who chanced to see her killed the snake and released her, but he himself tried to wed her by force. Seeing no way of escape, she pronounced a curse, and he fell dead.

Q: Sita did not curse Ravana.

A: Nor did Draupadai, when carried off by the king of the Sindhus. But fearing that Ravana would either slice her to pieces and eat her up or force a marriage on her, Sita walked up to the nearest tree to hang herself. I am afraid no purpose will be served by pursuing the contrast further.

Q: Yes; virtue can be manifested through widely different reactions.

Q: How and when did the tide turn?

A: Slightly in her favour after one more mishap. She went along with a caravan to some distance, but wild elephants charged it and inflicted severe damage. Some of the party then accused her of being the evil force behind the tragedy. They even threatened to kill her. She continued to wander, clad in only half a piece of cloth, and often ridiculed by thoughtless crowds, till the queen of the Chedis took pity upon her and engaged her as an attendant. Although Damayanti was closely related to her, the queen was unable to identify her as Nala's wife. While accepting service, Damayanti laid down a few conditions protecting her chastity and favouring the search for her husband.

Q: I wonder how many of our modern women can conceal their identity and cheerfully take up menial service under such conditions. Well, how did she get out of this place?

A: One Sudeva, sent by Damayanti's father, to search for her and her husband, recognised her because of some special identifying mark on her forehead. After the first surprise was over, she was right royally sent to her father's place. From there she planned systematically to trace the whereabouts of Nala.

Q: You may leave off details. Sketch only the main steps, please.

A: First she composed a poem, omitting all names, but closely describing Nala's desertion of her. She added a line saying that she was still expecting his return. She caused this poem to be chanted far and wide, knowing that if Nala heard it, he would send a fitting reply. Nala, deformed by a curse, was then serving king Rituparna as his charioteer, under the name Bahuka. Bahuka was the one person who replied suitably. The messenger quickly returned to Damayanti, and this made her carry the quest further.

Q: Say that the 'detective' got the first clue! Pray proceed!

A: The main hitch was the discrepancy caused by the figure of Bahuka. And it persisted up to the end. Anyway, the next logical step seemed to be to test if Bahuka had skill in managing horses. With the approval of her mother, Damayanti decided to inform Rituparna that she was going to marry again, and that he was welcome to attend the 'self-choice.' The time allowed was so short that none but Nala could cover the distance in a chariot and arrive before it was too late. Rituparna took the matter in right earnest, and in a way Nala, his car-driver, too did. From the top of her terrace Damayanti watched their coming-

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Q: What was the next step?

A: Damayanti sent her maid, Kesini, a number of times to Bahuka, who was also acting as the king's cook. She was asked to stand by Bahuka and watch what happened if fire and water were not given in time.

Q. Now I see the beauty of the boon episode! Fire and water would come up of themselves if Bahuka was really Nala!

A: Exactly. Damayanti did not stop with this. She also made Kesini bring cooked articles, just to taste them and see if Bahuka had the same skill as a cook, as Nala had.

Q: What further could she test?

A: Why? She sent the children and saw how Bahuka was moved. He had to tell some story to Kesini to explain his strong emotions!

Q: Did not Nala know that he was being tested?

A: We cannot say, but he pressed Kesini not to run into his area so often lest people should begin to scandalize her and him! Anyway, he was not left free much longer. With the permission of her mother, she made Bahuka enter her chamber to conduct the last stage in the investigation.

Q: We can infer what followed. Damayanti asked why Nala had deserted her. He said he counted upon her chastity to protect her. He, in his turn, wanted to know why she thought of marrying again. She assured him that it was only a ruse to fetch him before her. And her best proof was that Rituparna alone had been invited.

A: Now I shall become the questioner. Who, do you think, made the last move in the game?

Reply: Nala; for he had to remember the snake and put on the magic cloth to regain his original form.

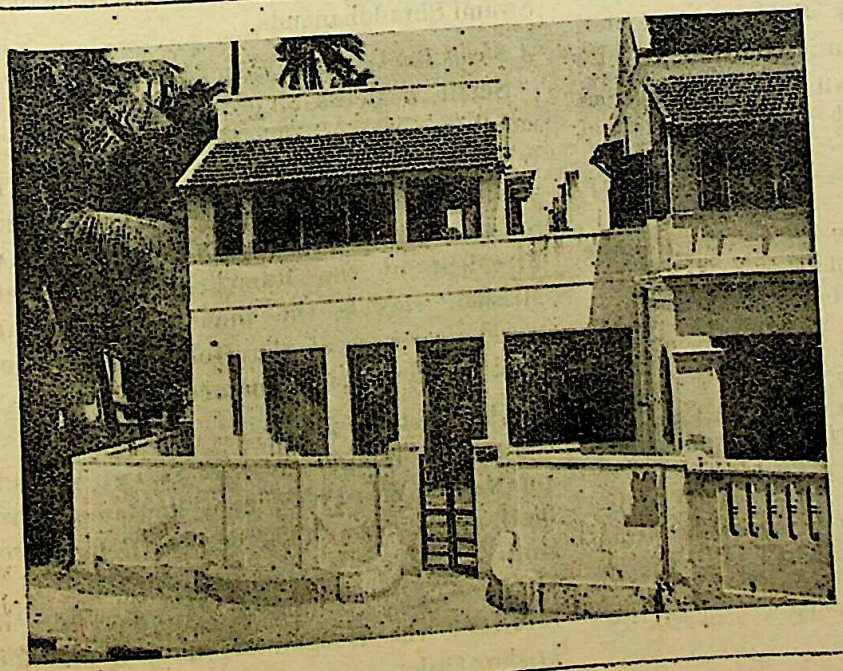
A: Something more followed. Nala learned the secret of dice from Rituparna and won back his throne from Pushkara. But since evil had left all of them the reconciliation was wonderful. Nala pardoned his brother and gladly gave him half the kingdom.

* * *

The discussion made us see vividly what majestic thought movements Damayanti generated when assailed by repeated strokes of calamity. We understood why Swami Vivekananda said that Sita, Savitri and *Damayanti* have set the ideals for Indian womanhood. We become anxious to make a similar study of the other characters as well.

भग चरैवेति।

SUBANDHU



*

During her pilgrimage in the South in the beginning of 1911, when the Holy Mother visited Madras, she stayed in this house, No. 127, Brodies Road, situated opposite to Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras

*

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS ISSUE

Invocation to the Motherhood of God

Motherhood of God which manifested itself in Sri Sarada Devi was invoked in India right from the Vedic times. Even today our hearts surge up in tune with the same invocations, for fundamentally our spiritual necessities continue to be the same.

Sri Sarada Shodasi Stuti

Sanskrit hymn to the Holy Mother and its English translation offered by DR. V. RAGHAVAN, M.A., Ph.D., Reader in Sanskrit, Madras University.

Hymn to the Holy Mother

This hymn by SWAMI VIRAJANANDA, the Sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order, who passed away in May 1951, is being posthumously published.

As the Apostles Saw Her

Here we have a collection of utterances regarding the Holy Mother by thirteen DIRECT SANNYASIN DISCIPLES of Sri Ramakrishna. Save and except Sri Ramakrishna himself none knew and understood the Holy Mother better than these children of Sri Ramakrishna. Hence the supreme importance of their estimates which are presented here from various authentic sources.

We are furnishing here all the relevant references against the figures to be seen in the body of the article:

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII pp. 416-417. 3rd Edn.
2. *Eternal Companion: Brahmananda, His Life and Teachings* p. 112. 1945 Edn.
3. Courtesy: *Visva-vani*, Holy Mother Centenary Number.
4. *ibid.*
5. *For Seekers of God* p. 127, 1947 Edn.
6. *Mahapurush Shivananda*, p. 207. 1st Edn.
7. *Shivananda-Vani*, Part II, p. 79-81. 1st Edn.
8. From a Letter.
9. *ibid.*
10. *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, p. 236. 2nd [Edn.
11. *Sri Sri Saradananda Prasanga* p. 35. 1st Edn.
12. *ibid.* p. 28-30.
13. From the report of one day's conversation at 'Udbodhan'.
14. 15. 16. Courtesy: *Visva-vani*, Holy Mother Centenary Number.
17. From Diary of Ashramites published in *Udbodhan*. Agrahayana, 1359 (Bengali year)
18. *Sat-katha*, p. 13-16, 1st Edn.
19. From a letter.
20. *ibid.*
21. *Sri Ma Sarada Devi* p. 322-23, 1st Edn.
22. From letters.
23. *Satprasange Swami Vijnanananda*, p. 111, 1st
24. *ibid.* [Edn.
25. Conversations of Swami Vijnanananda, *Prabuddha Bharata*, September, 1950.
26. 'Reminiscences of the Holy Mother' by Kumud Bandhu Sen, *Prabuddha Bharata*, August, 1953.
27. *ibid.*—September, 1953.

For some of the above references courtesy: *Udbodhan*, Holy Mother Birth Centenary Number.

Sri Sarada, The Consummation of the Ramakrishna-ideal (Editorial)

An attempt has been made here to show that what is Sri Sarada is the Ramakrishna-ideal, the very consummation of it.

I saw Her in Twilight

Personal reminiscences of SWAMI VIRAJANANDA, translated from original Bengali by Swami Shraddhananda.

A Small Incident in the Holy Mother's Life

Small incidents of great lives are not of small importance. They are like dew drops reflecting the splendour of the sun. This small article from the pen of HIS HOLINESS SRIMAT SWAMI SANKARANANDA MAHARAJ, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, reveals the innate courtesy and world-awareness of the Holy Mother, God-rivetted though she remained all the time.

My Most Motherly Mother

Personal reminiscences of SWAMI VISHUDDHANANDA, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The original Bengali version of the article appeared in the Holy Mother Birth Centenary Number of the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order.

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Sarada Devi and Her Divine Motherhood

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA, of the Ramakrishna Order. Sometime Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* and the *Vedanta Kesari*. With personal reminiscences enriched by meditations, the author here throws light on the most significant aspect of the Holy Mother's personality.

Sri Sarada, The Universal Mother

PROFESSOR T. M. P. MAHADEVAN, M.A., PH.D., Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras, indicates here the possible impacts of the Holy Mother's Universal Motherhood on the spiritual future of India and humanity.

Sri Sarada—The Ideal of Womanhood

SWAMI VIRESWARANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, brings home as to what constitutes the ideality in the Holy Mother's life, acceptable to the entire womanhood of the world.

Sarada Devi : The Triumph of Womanhood

Womanhood in the world is on the march and in fight. But what they actually require is the guiding power of a truly triumphant woman. DR. C. T. K. CHARI M.A., PH. D., of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology, Madras Christian College, interprets that guiding power which is Sri Sarada Devi from the universal standpoint of what he calls 'Ramakrishna Vedanta'.

The Holy Mother : Her Divinity

Personal reminiscences of SWAMI SUNDARANANDA who was for many years the Editor of the *Udbodhan*.

An Inkling

SWAMI GAURISWARANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order. This rendered piece forms a part of the reminiscences of the author appearing in the Holy Mother Centenary Number of the *Udbodhan*.

Redeeming Grace of the Universal Mother

MR. WOLFRAM H. KOCH, a German Vedantin, here dwells upon some rare cases of spiritual comradeship between men and women saints of Christendom and in this context studies the wonderful spiritual comradeship of Ramakrishna-Sarada and its possible influences on humanity.

What Makes Simple Holy Mother so Powerful

SWAMI PAVITRANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, Leader, Vedanta Society, New York, U.S.A., in this short article considers the secret of Holy Mother's growing influence over ever-increasing number of lives of men and women both in the East and West.

Sri Sarada Devi : The True Representative of Divine Motherhood

This piece 'is a simple recital of faith' by a WESTERN DEVOTEE, who prefers to remain incognito.

The Inner Pilot

SWAMI VASUDEVANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, sometime Editor, *Udbodhan*, here gives an idea of the Holy Mother's great Guru-sakti. This piece is adapted from the author's reminiscences of the Holy Mother published in the *Udbodhan*, Magha, 1359.

The Holy Mother—Her Part in the Origin and Growth of the Ramakrishna Movement

SWAMI TAPASYANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, sometime Editor of the *Vedanta Kesari*, here brings to the fore a little discussed theme and thus throws light on an aspect of the Holy Mother's spiritual leadership, so typically her own.

Fallacious Oppositions

MON. JEAN HERBERT, the well-known French Indologist, analyses here how the teachings of the Holy Mother can help us through the host of pairs of opposites which invade us in modern conditions of life.

A Retrospection

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order. This rendered piece forms a part of an article appearing in the Holy Mother Centenary Number of the *Udbodhan*.

Great Women Associates of the Holy Mother

SWAMI TEJASANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, sometime Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* and the *Vedanta Kesari*, writes here about the four great associates of the Holy Mother. These great associates help us in their turn

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to understand the Holy Mother centering whose life they grew to their heights.

Supreme Pattern of India's Ideal of the Virgin Mother—Sri Sarada Devi

BHIKSHU ANAND ISABODH reflects here on one of the most significant aspects of the Holy Mother's life, her Virgin Motherhood.

Lessons from Holy Mother's Life

Treasures of the Spirit abound in the oceanic life of the Holy Mother. But how to get at them? BRAHMACHARI YOGATMACHAITANYA of the Ramakrishna Order discusses this 'how' here.

Saving Touch

SWAMI ATMAPRAKASHANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order. This rendered piece is adapted from his reminiscences appearing in the Holy Mother Centenary Number of the *Udbodhan*.

The Philosophy of Sri Sarada Devi—The Holy Mother

One very rarely heard the Holy Mother speaking 'philosophy'. But every single moment of her life she lived one. SRIMATI SARASVATI CHENNAKESAVAN M.A., Lecturer in Philosophy, Pachiappa's College, Madras, indicates in this article what philosophy that was.

Life of Sri Sarada Devi—A Challenge to Modern Women: **A Symposium**

Nothing could be farther from the Holy Mother's temper than an idea of challenging. But her life indeed constitutes a challenge to the entire womanhood of the world. This challenge is nothing but a call irresistible and a persuasion profound to the women of the world to realize within themselves their divine potentialities.

The piece by SAROJINI NAIDU, who does not require to be introduced, is reproduced from a report of her speech (Courtesy: *Amritabazar Patrika*, Calcutta) delivered during the 86th Birthday Anniversary of the Holy Mother, on December, 15, 1938, at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The report also appeared in the January 1939 issue of the *Vedanta Kesari*.

SRIMATI SUBHADRA HAKSAR, Secretary, All India Convention of Women Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

DR. KALPALATA DEVI, M.A., PH.D., a dedicated worker in the Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Vidyalaya, Calcutta.

Ramakrishna Everywhere

SWAMI PARAMESWARANANDA, of the Ramakrishna Order. This rendered piece is from the Swami's reminiscences which appeared in the *Udbodhan*, Sravana, 1359.

Homes of the Holy Mother

The Jagad-guru in Sri Sarada Devi functioned in the world in the home-ly—motherly way that was peculiarly her own. Hence the Homes of the Holy Mother are of as infinite interest to her devotees as the temple garden of Dakshineswar is to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA, Editor, *Udbodhan* shows us round the Mother's homes.

A Tribute to the Holy Mother

This AUSTRALIAN DEVOTEE (Miss Emily J. Cook) belongs to the ever expanding spiritual family of the Holy Mother.

How the Holy Mother Strikes Me, A Western Woman: **A Symposium.**

The appeal and impression which the life and teachings of the Holy Mother make upon the thinking Western womanhood are presented here T V—fashion. One can just see how sitting in the very heart of the world the Mother has been touching hearts open unto the light that is within the heart of hearts of all.

SISTER DEVAMATA, an American disciple of the Ramakrishna Order, who was associated with the work of Swami Paramananda, passed away several years back. This piece is culled from her book *Days in an Indian Monastery*.

ELIZABETH DAVIDSON, An American devotee, Secretary, Ramakrishna—Vivekananda Center of New York.

HERTHA MARTENS, a German disciple of the Ramakrishna Order, who came to India several years back for spiritual purposes.

JOAN RAYNE ('DAYA'), A British disciple of the Ramakrishna Order, who sojourned in

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India for the last two years before returning to the Vedanta Society of Southern California as a Brahmacharini.

GWENDOLYN THOMAS, an American student of Vedanta, associated with the Vedanta Society of New York.

MARION CODE ('MUKTI'), a New Englander of the East Coast of U. S. A., a student of Vedanta who came to India a year ago, for spiritual purposes.

CHARLOTTE BOSE ('SARALA'), an American disciple of the Ramakrishna Order, who toured India extensively for the last two years and visited places of cultural and spiritual interest.

EDLE ALMA SAXLUND, a born Norwegian lady artist (painter) who has been in India for the last twenty years.

Sri Sarada Devi, Women and Social Service

DR. (MRS.) MUTHULAKSHMI REDDI, M.B. & C.M., M.L.C., eminent social worker of Madras, founder of 'Avvai Home', signalizes here the urgency of following the life-example of the Holy Mother in the context of the problems facing Indian womanhood of today.

Womankind Through the Eyes of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI VIMALANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, sometime Editor of the *Vedanta Kesari* presents here an elaborate and systematic study on a topic, which covers a good part of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. The article being a long one, we have to publish it in instalments.

The Conception of Sakti in Indian Philosophy

DR. ROMA CHAUDHURI, M.A., D.Phil. (Oxon), F.A.S., Principal and Professor of Philosophy, Govt. Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta, here presents a thesis on the evolution of the conception of Sakti in Indian Philosophy beginning from the Vedic time to the time of Ramakrishna-Sarada. Long as the article is, because of the vastness of the ground it covers, we have to publish it in instalments.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission's Work for Women's Welfare.

In this documented article, SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA of the Ramakrishna Order, sometime Editor of the *Vedanta Kesari*, presents here a consolidated study of an important aspect of the Mission's work which originates from Sri Sarada Devi's unique partnership in the life and mission of Sri Ramakrishna.

Erratum: In line 21st, 1st column p. 147 of the article please read 1936 instead of 1939. The first dedicated woman worker joined the Ashrama in 1936.

Women and Hindu Monasticism

Primarily due to the mighty influence of the Holy Mother's life, Hindu women's interest in monasticism seems to be on the increase after a long lapse of centuries. BRAHMACHARINI ASHA, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Vidyalaya, Calcutta, studies the case of monasticism of Hindu women from the earliest times and shows what promise future holds before Hindu women in this regard under the inspiring implications of the Holy Mother's life.

Women Saints of Christendom

SRI P. CHENCHIAH M.L., Advocate, Madras, a liberal Christian, offers here a consolidated study on a topic which will be of interest to any student of comparative religion. Length of the article requires us to publish it by instalments.

Spiritual Philosophy of Islam

DR. M. HAFIZ SYED, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., Retd. Professor, University of Allahabad, writes on a topic which should be better discussed in the seminars of comparative religion and philosophy.

A Survey of the Present State of Women's Education in the World

One can have in this article a bird's-eye view of the whole situation of women's education in the world. MRS. G. CRUZ-SANTOS, the writer of this article, belongs to the Department of Education, Unesco, and is specially concerned with its programme activities dealing with women's education.

We are thankful to the Education Clearing House, Unesco, Paris, for getting this article specially written for this Number.

The Education Our Daughters Require

SISTER R. S. SUBBALAKSHMI, a prominent social worker and educationist in Madras

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gives here her views as to the ideal type of women's education that should come to prevail in India.

Women and the Renaissance of Indian Art

SRIMATI RUKMINI DEVI, M.P., eminent exponent of Bharata Natya and founder, Kalakshetra, Adyar, Madras, makes here a plea for purity in Indian art and underlines women's special responsibility in this regard.

Women's Suffrage The World Over

This documented article has been prepared under the guidance of Prof. R. Bhaskaran M.A., of the Department of Politics, University of Madras, by three lady research scholars, SRIMATIS G. SUNDARI M.A., B. SAROJINI DEVI M.A., and N. R. VISALAKSHI M.A. Much information have gone to make this article a helpful one for reference purposes.

What Women Can do to Help Build the One World

Can women do anything to change the sorry state of affairs of the world? MRS. CHIT THOUNG, Asst. Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Society, Rangoon, attempts an answer to this question.

Avvaiyar

SRI T. S. AVINASILINGAM, M.P., Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Perianaickenpalayam, Madras, gives a pen-portrait of an exalted character, which inspires millions of people in South India.

Some Great Women of Maratha History

This short article is from the pen of DR. S. N. SEN, M.A., PH.D., Retd. Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi.

Charaiveti: 'Queenly Quest'

SUBANDHU here presents the well-known story of Damayanti and shows a way of helpful analysis.

Great Women of India

This book-review is by SRI K. BALASUBRAHMANIA IYER, B.L., M.L.C. Hon. Secretary, Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras.

Sri Ma Sarada Devi—from which book we have presented some revealing incidents in pages 76, 100, 130, 136, 148,—is the authentic Life of the Holy Mother (in Bengali) by SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA, the English translation of which will be soon published from Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

Our Submission: We made announcements in a pamphlet and also in some previous issues of the *Vedanta Kesari* as to the nature of articles likely to appear and the names of the prospective writers. It will be noticed that articles by eleven writers whose names were announced are not appearing, whereas articles by a larger number of writers whose names were not announced are appearing. This change was necessitated by the exigencies of the situation through which we had to function. We did not ultimately receive some of the promised articles. Some valuable articles came too late for the issue. (We shall gradually publish them in general issues.) Some articles occupied more than allotted space thus necessitating the keeping away of some other articles.

Though this issue is page-numbered 1 to 200, it forms an integral part of the Vol. XLI of the Journal.

THIS OUR LITTLE OFFERING

On this great occasion of the first Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother in the fulness of our heart we place at her redeeming feet this our little offering, this number of the *Vedanta Kesari*.

The privilege, the benefit and the joy that have been ours, all who have been associated in making this offering, are better left undefined. It was impossible to have thought of the Mother without being transformed to a degree.

That is all right. This question of personal account. But has the offering a chance of being acceptable to the Mother? That too is personal account! But what question that? Is our Mother of that type about whom one has to be in flurry or worry? If the toddler brings the Mother a penny-pipe and wants her to blow through it a most wonderful music will she sit stiff and respectable? Will it be safe for her to do so? Our Mother has better wisdom! How wonderful she has been!

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Once Swami Yogananda presented the Mother a quilt. Due to long use when it came to a pass that it could not be further used, one day the mother asked a devotee to get the cotton of the quilt carded again and the cover changed, so that it would be new. But a while after, it occurred to the Mother that the familiar appearance of the presentation of the dear child will then change. This very thought afflicted her and she at once said to the devotee: 'No, Vibhuti, you have not to take the quilt (for repair). Yogen gave me this quilt at the very sight of which I remember him.'

Once Ramamaya (Swami Gauriswarananda) was sunning Mother's clothes from her trunk. He lifted a tattered silken wrapper and said, 'Mother, why do you keep this? There's nothing in it. I shall throw it away.' 'No, my child, let it remain there. With what great affection Nivedita presented it to me?', the Mother said anxiously. She put cumin seeds in the folds of that torn wrapper and kept it away carefully saying, 'When I look at this cloth I remember Nivedita. What a wonderful daughter she was! In the beginning she could not talk with me; some one among the boys would interpret her. Afterwards she picked up Bengali. She used to love me deeply.'

A devotee one day offered some mangoes to the Mother. The shop keeper had just cheated the devotee who won't taste a mango before purchasing, for it was meant for offering. The mangoes were so sour that when after duly offering them to the Lord they were served to the devotees none could take them. But the Mother took one full mango and said, 'Ah, it is fine sourish mango!'

Such is our Mother.

Mother bends benign not because of the pulling power of any one's offering—all offerings are gathered from her own stores alone—but due to the weight of her own unbounded compassion. She is helpless!

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE GREAT WOMEN OF INDIA*

The Ramakrishna Mission has done a great public service in bringing out this valuable book on the 27th December, 1953, the first Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother, Sri Saradamani Devi, the blessed consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. When I saw the book during a very well attended public meeting to celebrate that day at the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, I was immensely delighted with it. It was specially sent by plane from the headquarters at Calcutta to reach Mylapore on that day. It is truly worthy of the memory of the Holy Mother. It supplies a long-felt want and satisfies the crying need of the day. The two eminent editors, Swami Madhavananda and Dr. R. C. Mazumdar have done their task very well indeed. The book contains articles from the pen of Dr. R. C. Mazumdar and other distinguished scholars including women and is enlivened by an introduction by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

2. Truly, it may be said that Indian womanhood reached its acme of spiritual perfection in Sri Sarada Devi. The thrilling account of her life, forming the concluding portion of the book written beautifully by Swami Nirvedananda of the Mission brings home to the reader beyond doubt, that in the Holy Mother the age-long illustrious ideals for which Indian womanhood has been justly famous, attained their glorious fulfilment. It reads like a romance. An obscure uneducated village girl belonging to the middle class society in Bengal attained the pinnacle of glory as the spiritual partner of the Saint of Dakshineswar. There was not the least trace of carnality in their married life. It was a blessed spiritual union unparalleled by any other instance in history that we have known. Sri Sarada Devi rightly enjoyed the unique honour and blessing of being worshipped by her husband as the embodiment of Sakti, the Mother of the

* GREAT WOMEN OF INDIA, (Holy Mother Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume). Editors: Swami Madhavananda and Dr. Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, M.A., PH.D., F.A.S., Published by Advaita Ashrama, 4 Wellington Lane, Calcutta 13, Pages 570, Price Rs. 20.

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Universe. After the passing away of her husband, she filled the role of a loving and an affectionate mother, to all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and to the innumerable devotees who thronged to her for spiritual advice and consolation. Her infinite love, her absolute self-renunciation, her unruffled patience, matchless chastity, spotless purity and ungrudging obedience to her husband will ever remain as shining examples for the women of our country.

3. Among our people a profound ignorance prevailed till now about the part played by the women in India throughout the centuries and of the influnce they had all along exercised in society and in the shaping of our culture and civilization. So much so, there has been unjust and ill-informed criticism by our own people about the place assigned to women in society in India, which has also been fostered by the western writers on the subject. This book will dispel these false notions and will furnish a true answer to such criticisms. At the present time, our society is passing through a transitional stage and many ideas are in the air about the reformation of Hindu society, of the laws of marriage, the relationship of the sexes and the property rights of women. At such a juncture the book which furnishes a true account of the lives of great Indian women and of the part played by them in Indian history will give to every one of us the right perspective with which the problems in respect of Indian women should be viewed. The reader will be impressed with the large number of women that have played a great part in our history in all fields of human endeavour viz. in art, letters, administration, religion and spirituality. In fact, in no country in the world have women, on the whole, played such a distinguished part as in India. Up till now, the contrary has been our idea and we will be readily disabused of it when we read this book. As has been said in the preface, the book presents a brilliant array of Indian women, many of whom have been little known to us. It gives a panoramic view of the lives, character and achievements of Indian women from Ghosha, Apala and Lopamudra of dim Vedic antiquity to Rama Bai, Kamini Roy and Sarojini Naidu of our own day. Unfortunately as Dr. R. C. Mazumdar points out, there has been a deplorable lack of accurate historical material about the incidents in the lives of many great Indian women. Still there is sufficient material for a sympathetic reader to imagine from such scanty accounts that have been given of them, how great their career and achievement should have really been, if such record had been available.

4. It was Lord Tennyson, who said in his beautiful poem 'THE PRINCESS' that woman is not undeveloped man but diverse. His dearest bond is this 'Not like to like but like in difference'. To me it truly sums up the approach of the great founders of Hindu civilization and culture to womanhood. At the same time, long long ago, it was the Veda that declared 'the wife is the half of the husband' and the conception of 'ARDHANARISWARA' typifies this noble truth. Again it was the application of this principle that was responsible for the Hindu law-givers giving the right of inheritance to the widow. It was this that made Vasishtha declare in the *Ramayana* that Sita was entitled to the heir apparent's throne after Rama's banishment to the forest, in the memorable scene when he denounced Kaikeyi in scathing terms on seeing her exult in giving the bark-garment for Sita to wear, on the eve of her accompanying Rama to the forest. Though woman is undoubtedly the inseparable half of man still she is a distinctive half. It is this that has been emphasized throughout in our culture and civilization. In the article written by Mrs. Leela Mazumdar about 'Women in Modern India', she indicates the way in which Indian women can and ought to improve their status and condition in the modern age. She has shown how the position of women has changed in Indian society at the present day and in what way their full emancipation should be brought about. But she is careful to point out that Indian women must seek their fulfilment and must secure their rightful place with men, in their own way, the Indian way. She says :

> 'Though a certain section of educated society will blindly imitate the western ways of thought, action and fashion, the more thoughtful have realised that if one has anything to contribute to the world, it must be conceived in one's own soul and be no external appendage. Indian women must imbibe all the learning of the world but be truly Indian in their thought, speech and action.'

It has to be realised that there are qualities, characteristics and a distinct attitude to life of Indian women which are not shared by their sisters of the West and it will be a tragedy if in our genuine effort for the advancement of Indian women these characteristics and qualities and the peculiar approach to life which have typified Indian womanhood should be lost.

5. A careful study of the characteristics of the great women that have been portrayed in these pages will make us fully realise these distinctive features of Indian womanhood. The ambition of women in India has been not merely to play their part as individuals apart in society but to fulfil the distinguished role as partners in life with their husbands and as mothers. A passion for gay life and for the giddy pleasure of the eyes, a thorough materialistic outlook of life, flirtation and fickleness, an utter disregard of social conventions

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and usages, a domineering and assertive nature and casting off all softer virtues—all these have been generally foreign to the nature of Indian womanhood. The chapter on 'Mother Worship in India' in this book will clearly indicate the extraordinary emphasis placed on the role of women as mothers, in Indian thought. It is this conception of Mother worship that contributed not a little to the glorious flowering of motherhood in India and the highest place of honour given to her in the Indian family and society. One impression that will be left in our minds by reading the whole book will be that there was a gradual deterioration from Vedic times to the present day in respect of the position of Indian women in society, their rights and privileges and in the treatment accorded to them by men. How far this impression given by the book will accord with the true state of things is not beyond doubt. From the materials available to us, I feel it may not be possible for any true historian to substantiate the truth of this impression fully. At best it can be said only that there have been ups and downs in the matter of the place assigned to women and their rights in our country.

The phenomenon has been due to many causes. The frequent invasions by foreigners and the resultant contact with outside cultures played a great part in causing these vicissitudes that took place in the status and condition of women in society. Specially after the advent of the aggressive religion of Islam in our country, many changes which seem to us now to be of a retrograde character were necessitated by the circumstances brought about by Muslim rule in India from the 11th and 12th centuries and the effect of the forcible abduction and conversion of women, such as the tendency to the seclusion of women and early marriages. Even though some of the changes appear to us to be of retrograde character, the motive behind all these has been the anxiety for preservation of the chastity and purity of Indian womanhood. It will not be correct to conclude from these that Indian tradition has not respected womanhood or neglected to accord their place to women in society. Long before the people in the West thought of giving rights of property to women, long before the Married Women's Property Acts were passed in England by which English women were accorded full rights to property, the women of India enjoyed ample right of property, and succession. So early as the days of Yaska, we find in his *Nirukta* a discussion about the equality of sons and daughters in regard to property. It was on account of the fact that women enjoyed dignity and respect both in the home and in the outside society all along in our country that it was so easy in our own time for women to get the right to vote and acquire other privileges and to secure the fundamental rights of equality with men in the Constitution of India. While the women of England had to put forth a great struggle for the acquisition of these rights and privileges men in India yielded these to women without the slightest demur. Indian women had no necessity to be militant or to use violence to secure their rights and privileges. Now that we have attained independence and the shaping of society is in our hands far-reaching changes may be effected in respect of the status, rights and privileges of women. But whatever revolution may take place in the character and outlook of Indian womanhood, one thing is clear. We should preserve the distinctive type that has been evolved by the great women of the past in India whose names have been inscribed in letters of gold in her history and literature.

6. The famous poet Sri Harsha said in his 'Naishadiya Kavya' that India was famous throughout the world for the chastity of her women and the noble ideals of married life and that was why the heroine of the poem 'Damayanti' deliberately chose Nala for her Lord and decided to lead the life of a married woman in Bharata Varsha instead of going to heaven as the consort of Indra. The Indian great women have been famous for their long-suffering patience, their innate modesty and dignity, for their spotless purity and for their selfless love and obedience to their husbands. These shall ever remain as the glorious characteristics of Indian womanhood throughout the ages and we should all hope that no changes will be allowed to be effected in our country so as to impair the glory of these characteristics and lower the prestige and dignity of Indian womanhood.

The timely publication of this book on the blessed day of the Holy Mother's Birth Centenary will surely give the needed corrective to our ideas and educate us in the right attitude to the social changes in respect of women's rights and privileges.

K. BALASUBRAHMANIA IYER

God is one's very 'own'. It is the eternal relationship. One realizes Him in proportion to the intensity of one's feeling for Him. Don't be afraid. Always remember that somebody is protecting you.

HOLY MOTHER

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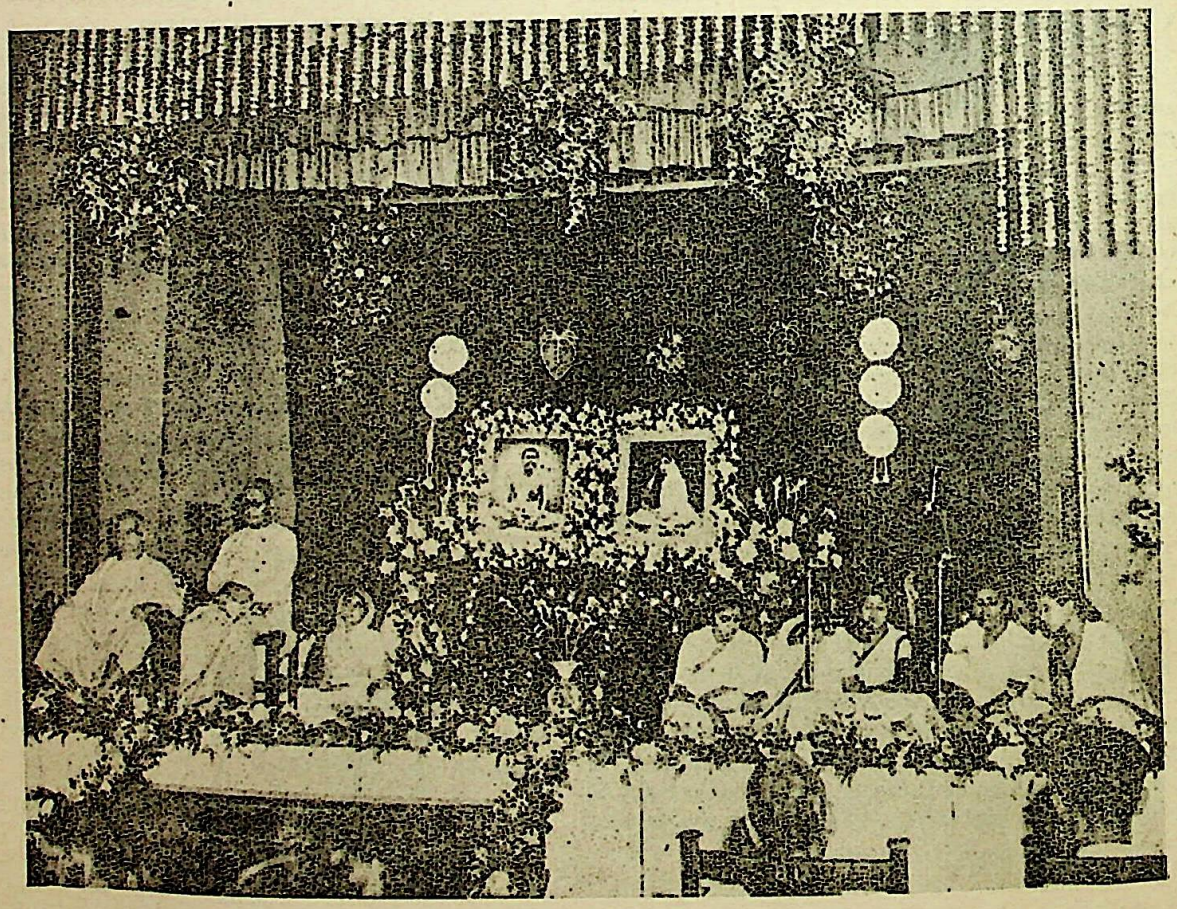
NEWS AND REPORTS

ALL-INDIA CONVENTION OF WOMEN DEVOTEES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SRI SARADAMANI DEVI

DR. ROMA CHAUDHURI
Chairman, Reception Committee

On the supremely auspicious occasion of the Birth-Centenary of Holy Mother, Sri Saradamani Devi, an All-India Convention of the Women Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Saradamani Devi was held in the University Institute Hall, Calcutta, from 2nd April to the 6th April 1954. Fifty delegates from different parts of India such as Delhi, Shillong, Madras, Patna, Nagpur, Coorg, Andhra, Trichur, Gauhati, Calcutta and from Rangoon attended the Convention. A Reception Committee, with a large number of enthusiastic local devotees, was formed with the present writer as Chairman and Smt. Subhadra Haksar as Secretary.

On the first day, a public meeting open to all, was held under the very kind presidentship of His Holiness, Srimat Swami Sankarananda Maharaj, President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission; but as he could not remain till the end of the meeting, after his departure, Swami Madhavananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, very kindly presided over the rest of the function. The huge Hall was packed to capacity with devoted hearts, eager to pay



The opening session of the Convention at the University Institute Hall, Calcutta. On the extreme left of the dais is seated His Holiness Srimat Swami Sankarananda Maharaj, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and next to him is seen Swami Madhavananda, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

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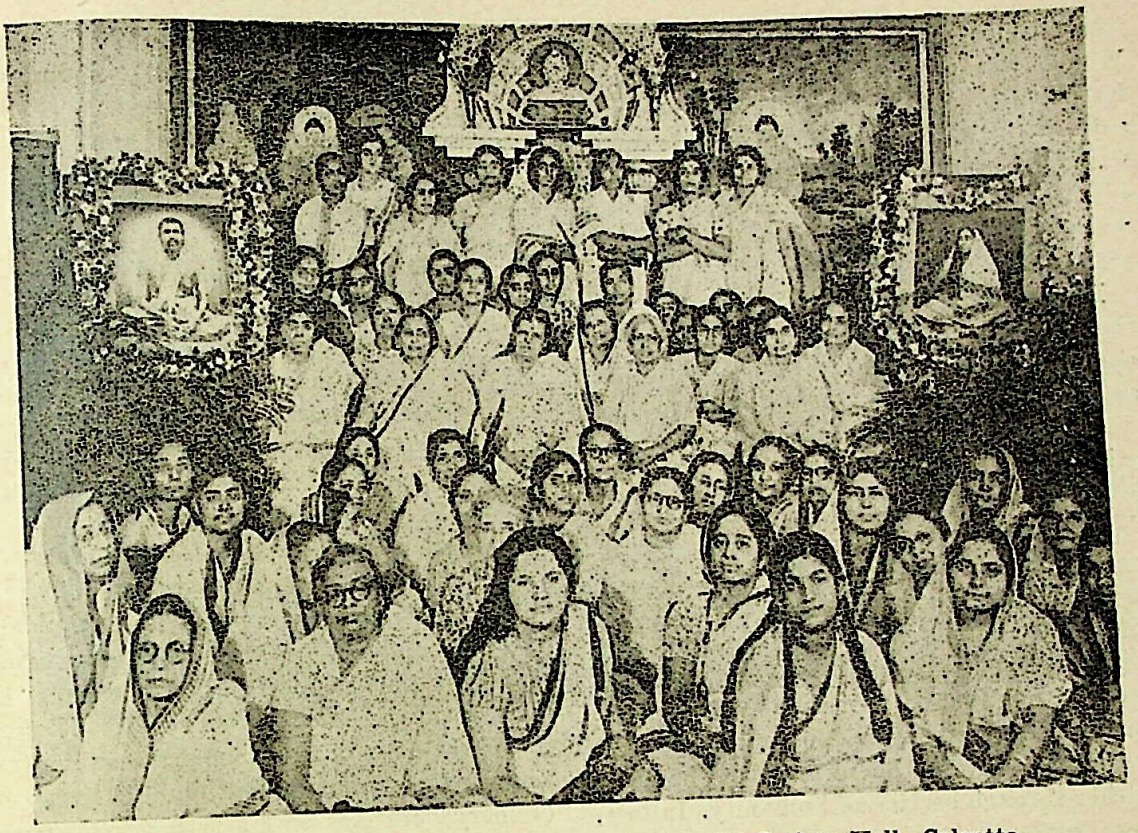

The closing session of the Convention at Mahabodhi Society Hall, Calcutta.

homage to the Holy Mother. From a beautifully decorated platform, from which looked straight, calm and serene, the flower-studded portraits of this Divine Couple, upon the vast multitude of variegated humanity united with a common fraternal bond, Srimat Swamiji, in a soul-stirring presidential address, invoked 'the Daughters of the Divine Mother' to carry out Her sacred mission—primarily by moulding themselves into images of the Mother, and secondarily, by rearing a nobler human race which will usher in a new age as prophesied by Swami Vivekananda.

> 'To understand and feel this' he concluded beautifully, 'to make ceaseless efforts to walk in the footsteps of the Holy Mother and inspire others to do the same, should be the real objective of every one attending the Convention'.

Even when he left the Meeting, his ennobling blessings rang, a long time after, through the length and breadth of the hall, and lifted everyone present to a higher spiritual sphere of beatitude and blessedness.

> 'May you carry what you will learn from this Convention to the regions you come from, and through similar gatherings, share the same with your sisters who are not present here today. May the Holy Mother sweeten your lives with bliss, and give you courage and strength to accomplish Her will!'

It was, indeed, a most inspiring experience for us all to listen to this enlivening invocation of one whose whole life is but an epitomization of the supreme ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi.

On the following days, four public meetings, open to ladies only, were held at the Mahabodhi Society Hall and all largely attended. In two of these meetings, two symposia on 'The significance of the Holy Mother's life' were held under the presidentship of Sister R. S. Subbalakshmi of Madras and Srimati Bani Devi of Sri Sarada Asram, Calcutta. A large number of delegates from different parts of the country participated, and beautifully brought out the manifold characteristics of the Divine Mother, as Wife, Mother, Teacher, Guide and Friend to all. In the remaining two Meetings, also, two

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interesting symposia on 'The Place of Indian Women in the Social Field' and 'Education for Women' were held under the presidentship of Sister Charusheila of Ananda Asram, Calcutta, and Srimati Mrinmayi Roy of Calcutta. Many thought-provoking suggestions were put forward by the delegates in this connection.

Every day, morning sessions were held in the Delegates' Camp for giving the delegates opportunities for a comparison of notes and an exchange of hearts. Perhaps, these small, informal, private gatherings were the most exhilarating and beneficial of all the various functions of the Convention. Sitting right at the feet of the flower-bedecked, incense-scented portraits of the Divine Couple, sisters from different parts of India and outside, so long quite unknown to one another, but now brought together by the supreme sense of being daughters of the same Mother, gave accounts of their individual and collective efforts in spreading the message of the Holy Mother through service of humanity. In fact, these gatherings of the devotee-delegates clearly brought out before all how the silent influence of the Holy Mother has been working all these years, with full and unabated force, through the length and breadth of the country, inspiring even common people to acts of uncommon virtues, uplifting even the lowliest to the highest level of spiritual perfection.

The delegates were given opportunities to visit holy places, like Belur Math, Dakshineswar, Kankurgachi Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Udbodhan Office (Mother's House), Cossipur Math, etc.. Every evening Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Lila Kirtana, Namagana, and Bhajans were sung by the delegates and some reputed local artists.

This Convention of Women Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Saradamani Devi was the first of its kind ever held; and it was really an indescribably wonderful one from every point of view. The first thing that struck all, was the deepest sincerity of each and every one connected with it, from the the highest to the lowest, not excluding the menials, day-labourers and sweepers. It was more like a 'Puja' than a mere convention—every one, through his or her allotted duty seemed to offer 'Anjali' to the Divine Mother, rather than do an ordinary work. The immortal spirit of our Mother appeared to infuse the whole gathering with an indescribable sweetness and serenity that still linger in the memory of us all. Secondly, it served as a means of self-examination to the delegates as to how far really they had been able, all these years, to mould their own lives according to the ideals of the Holy Mother. Thirdly, this Convention also brought together for the first time on a common platform, devoted hearts, dedicated to the same supreme ideals, and built up an unbreakable bond of love and fraternity amongst them all. Last, but not the least, this superb Convention held forth before us all, the lamp of new hope and new inspiration, and sent us back to our old lives and ordinary vocations with a better understanding and a renewed vigour, with refreshed minds and solaced hearts.

What this Convention and other allied meetings and functions have proved beyond doubt is that the machine-minded and science-proud but war-weary and unhappy world of ours is seeking solace in something other than mere material prosperity and mundane achievements. That these alone cannot lead mankind to real peace and bliss have been amply demonstrated by the present turmoils and tribulations all over the world. That is why, people, in their thousands are flocking to all the Holy Mother's Birth Centenary functions, with eager hearts, expecting to find a New path from her Divine Life. We have no doubt that many did find such a path and returned to their homes with a more optimistic outlook on life and a greater faith in the future of mankind.

May the blessings of the Holy Mother be on us always to guide us aright in the difficult and tortuous path of life!

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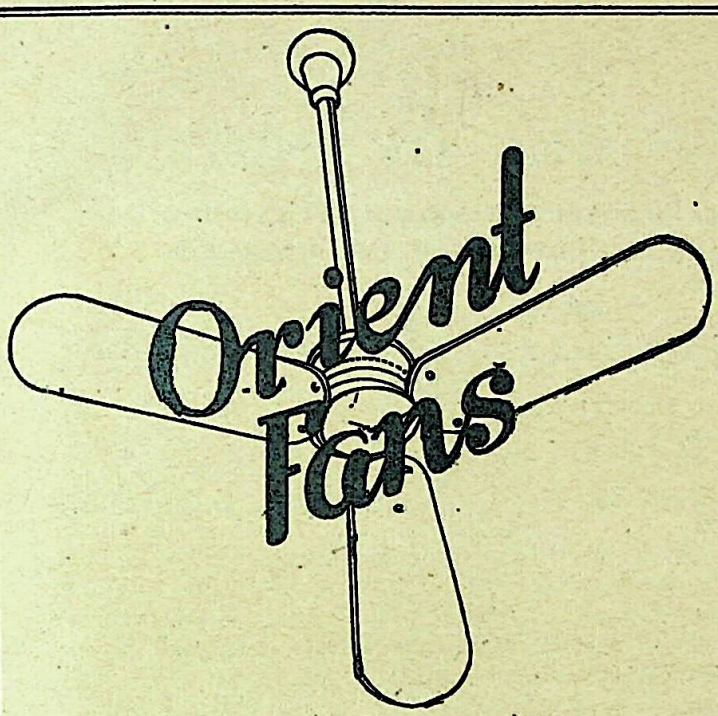

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